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FLEEING FROM LOVE.

BY MRS. HARRIET IRVING.



SHE STEPPED UP TO THEM QUICKLY. "WILL YOU PLEASE TELL ME WHERE I CAN FIND A NIGHT'S LODGING?" SHE ASKED.

Fleeing From Love.

BY MRS. HARRIET IRVING.

CHAPTER I.

COL. MONTIJELO'S GRANDDAUGHTER.

THE rain fell in long, slanting lines; the wind whistled through the wild orange and rustled the palmettoes around a low-roofed hut.

Within, a strong-limbed woman bent above a fire, stirring a huge kettle of turtle-soup, and, in a corner, a half dozen children, all of one hue in the darkness, and full of lusty life, kicked and sprawled and struggled for accommodation in a single bed upon the floor.

The woman was known as Yellow Jude. The hut was one of many on a Florida plantation, owned by a wealthy gentleman of Spanish descent, who dated its ownership in his family back to the seventeenth century, and whose high-sounding and euphonious title was Col. Pedro Aharaez Montijeo.

"Jude! Jude!"

The sounds came from without, a ghostly whisper, it almost seemed, and some such thought evidently crossed the woman's mind, for she turned with a shudder and peered into every corner of the dwelling with the scared look upon her features which only superstition can awaken. As she stood with a great wooden spoon uplifted in her hand, her huge form in bold relief against the red firelight, her eyes rolling, the cabin door opened and a figure wrapped in a white shawl crept stealthily in and sunk in a limp, helpless way upon the floor by the blazing hearth.

"You're all alone, Jude?" asked a feeble, timid voice.

"Yes, yes. You, Julianio"—to one of the restless children—"shet your head! Well! who ever spected to see you here, Miss Bella?"

The white shawl, drenched through and through with the pouring rain, slipped to the floor and displayed a young and slender figure clothed in the wrecks of costly garments, a face that must have been very beautiful before starvation set its stamp upon it, and, even now, was picturesque, with its great, lustrous eyes, full-lipped mouth and olive skin set in a frame of coal-black hair.

But the object which attracted Jude's attention lay in the woman's lap where she had dropped it from her nerveless arms, a new-born female child, wrapped only in a gay cotton skirt.

The girl burst out into violent sobbing.

"Oh, Jude! Jude!" she cried. "It was born out in the storm, in the dark, and I was all alone. I couldn't have got here, only I wanted to save its life."

After this outburst, the speaker's head fell back against the window-jamb, her eyes closed and the great tears welled out over her thin cheeks.

Yellow Jude went down on the floor, laying her wooden spoon upon the hearth, and took the infant from its mother's arms.

"So this is Massa Carlos' daughter," she said, with a broad grin of delight. "Pears like old Colonel might be kinder proud of her."

"Jude," said the fainting woman, raising her head with an effort, "has he said anything? Is he angry still?"

"Well," answered Jude, "ole colonel, he swears sometimes 'bout dat ar rascal—dat's what he calls Massa Carlos. 'Pears like he's mighty mad yet. Gorra mighty! What ails yer?"

She might well ask, for the olive skin had turned an ashy gray and a look had come into the great, bright eyes that never comes but once.

"No matter, Jude. Don't go—don't call! I'm dying. When it's over take baby to Carlos' father. Tell him we were very poor, but Carlos was too proud to come back, and I—I was too proud till now. His son is dead."

"Massa Carlos dead!" broke in the mulatto woman, with no emotion but surprise in her face.

"Yes, Jude," said the girl with a fresh flood of tears; "Carlos is dead, and—and—the child is his granddaughter. Ask him—to take—"

The slender hand that had touched Yellow Jude's arm stiffened and fell, the lips turned white, the eyes glazed, and five or six of the little black creatures came out of their shadowy corner and tip-toed curiously around the motionless figure on their mother's hearth. So the wife of Carlos Montijeo breathed her last.

Poor girl! her life had been a brief one. But

for the love of the boyish Carlos she might have lived on, happy in her humble station; but for his father's pride, she might have been lifted into honor and wealth. As it was, a year of fierce, conflicting emotion, another of struggling with poverty and hardships had brought the poor creature to an untimely death.

Her parents were of Greek descent, who had lived in the poorer quarters of St. Augustine, happy and peaceful, and busy with their little fruit-garden, and she had asked no better fate, until Carlos Montijeo, riding by, caught sight of her pretty face. Their eyes met, and, after that, passionate love and fierce, unyielding pride allowed of but one end to the story.

Colonel Montijeo was furious when he learned that his son's affections were fixed upon a girl who did not belong to the elite of St. Augustine.

The clashing of two strong wills ended in open rupture, and the man who might, in another cause, have given his life for his son's, drove that son from his presence into an untried world, secretly hoping that submission and repentance would follow fast upon his violent act, and as secretly grieving that Carlos, instead of returning to the parental roof, quietly disappeared with the cause of their disturbance.

Yellow Jude hustled a year old baby and one or two of the black-skinned creatures who had crept back to their sleep, out of the bed in the corner, lifted the slight form from the floor and placed it thereon, and then sat down before the fire, with the wailing infant in one hand and her wooden spoon in the other. She was evidently ill at ease, but scarcely horrified or grieved as one might have expected, and, as her little brood crept up around her knees, she gave a kick now and then, that sent them sprawling.

A second time, the cabin-door opened and a man entered. He wore a slouched hat and a great bushy beard, and was a shade lighter than Yellow Jude, with whose ways he was evidently well acquainted, for he said, as he came in, bending his head under the low lintel:

"All the picanninnies up yet? What's the matter?"

Then his eyes fell upon the child in Jude's arms, and next upon the bed in the corner, and he sat down on a wooden settle that stood against the wall, giving, as he did so, a most uncomfortable shiver.

"Ole colonel's daughter-in-law," explained Jude, giving a nod in the direction of the corpse. "I'm drefle puzzled what ter do. Like as not he'll bite my head off for tellin' him."

"Don't tell him," said the man, briefly.

Jude looked around with a start, at the same time proceeding to administer nourishment to the infant, whose cries were growing shriller and shriller every minute, while her own defrauded offspring crept up and tugged at her skirts.

"Who will tell him, then?" asked she.

Her visitor picked off a piece of straw from the hat he had been revolving in his hands, chewed it deliberately and spat it upon the floor before he answered.

"Jude, I want a hundred dollars."

"I s'pec' yer does," said Jude, somewhat scornfully, as if to say, "What has that to do with the subject?"

"There's a lady in town would give more than that for it, if it's a girl."

"Well, does you s'pose niggas can sell white folks' children?" was Jude's rejoinder.

"Not sell," said the man. "She wants to 'dopt a fine female infant. Not for sartin sure, but maybe. You'll go and see her to-morrow, Jude?"

Jude's eyes opened in wonderment.

"Ask her to 'dopt ole colonel's granddarter!"

"No, you— No, Jude. I'll tell you what to say. Say there's a lady sent you. A rich lady what has come to great destitution and is mos' likely dying. Some day I'll do something for you. How would you like to go to New York and be a lady?"

Yellow Jude guffawed with delight at the bare idea, but she broke off suddenly, and looked toward the bed.

"What shall we do with her, Jim?"

The man knit his brows in an ugly frown.

"Bury her, I suppose, to-morrow. Does that boy ever talk to white-folks?"

He indicated the eldest of Jude's children, a slim, bright-eyed boy of perhaps ten years of age.

"Wouldn't have the impudence. But I'll fix him. He knows how to mind his mammy."

The boy, who was called Pedro, had been standing, staring alternately at the two speakers. He sat down on the cabin floor now, and, wetting his fore-finger in his mouth, began

drawing lines on the hearth with it, and watching them dry in the heat of the fire.

When the dawn broke, the ghastly object which had lain in the corner of Jude's hut was no longer there, her children occupied its place again, and the first thing their mother did when she arose from the hempen rug on which she had lain, watching the dying sparks of the fire with meditative eyes, was to go and bend over the pile of straw and dry leaves, in which they lay, apparently inextricably mixed, black, white and yellow limbs and faces seeming to have parted company with their original owners.

"Pears like I an't going to get much out ob dis," she muttered, sulkily. "I'd get a present from ole colonel if it was mine. Might be mine, too. Dere's Seraphina Anastatia now. She's white."

As she looked down at the sleeping faces, a smile irradiated her own.

"I knows," she exclaimed gleefully. "I'll do boff. Nobody's been near us for nebber so long. You, Pedro Montijeo, git up."

Up jumped Pedro, wide awake and alert, all in a moment.

"Git up, all ob yer!" said Jude, enforcing her commands with various thrusts and jerks. She then left the cabin for a short time, returning with a large piece of fine matting, and, having a second time ousted two or three of the younger children, disposed herself with the new-born daughter of the Montijeo family in her arms, and this covering closely enveloping her form.

"Mammy's gone to bed," squeaked young Julianio.

"Yes, yes, young 'uns. You, Pedro! Go tell ole massa mammy's got a baby and it's mos' white."

Off went Pedro and he returned, breathless, calling out:

"Mammy, mammy! ole massa's coming and a doctor."

Col. Montijeo and a plain looking gentleman made their appearance at the end of the road, under the palmetto trees, the colonel's companion picking his way daintily, for, though the rain had ceased, there were immense pools of mud and water everywhere.

"That isn't Massa Doctor," whispered Jude, her eyes rolling in perplexity.

"That's a strange gemmen what stayed all night. He tole ole massa he was a doctor," answered Pedro.

"Now Pedro Montijeo, there's a good chile," said Jude in the same hurried whisper, "you go and set yere back 'gainst t' door ob de woodshed."

"I don't want to," began the child, whimpering, but a look of his mother's great eyes sent him off in haste.

Yellow Jude got the present she anticipated, in a remote corner of Col. Montijeo's plantation, a plot set apart for burial of the slaves, a funeral without ceremony and without mourners. The corpse of Carlos Montijeo's wife, wrapped only in a cloth of India matting, was laid beneath a few feet of earth, and there, without one solemn word or thought befitting the occasion, Yellow Jude and her male companion, the man who had visited her hut the night before, left it—little Pedro following them, a dark lantern in his hand and his feet winged with terror.

There was news on the plantation next day that Yellow Jude's baby was dead and buried.

CHAPTER II.

AN APPARITION.

THE me of the Raymonds was a fine old mansion of solid gray stone and Gothic architecture, situated in the suburbs of New York city, some eight miles distant from Mr. Raymond's business house, and looking more like some time-honored English country-seat than most of our modern residences. Evergreens overhanging eaves, and great elms spread their triumphal arches to its very doorsteps.

Here dwelt Angus Raymond's wife, and his daughter Ethel, and here Angus Raymond himself spent such part of his leisure hours as were not passed at his club or other places of recreation. There was little in common between him and his wife, who had long been a nervous invalid, not prostrated, never complaining, but utterly devoid of all interest in life as it seemed to those around her.

People who had known her before marriage said that she had been a lively girl enough—that the change had come to her in the second year of her wedded life when she had passed a

few months in St. Augustine for the sake of her own health and that of her young infant.

From the time when this child, her daughter Ethel, first remembered her, she had been like a shadow in her own house—quiet, undemonstrative, self-absorbed, occupied day in and day out with strips of useless embroidery, never used and never exhausted. Her husband never addressed a word to her save such as formal courtesy required, bestowing all his affection upon his daughter, to whom he was unusually indulgent and gentle, though by nature a hard, unyielding, pompous man.

Under the elms Ethel Raymond had played in her infancy; under the elms she had first met Walter Merritt, then a school-boy, and now they were promised to each other—she a girl of seventeen, he a youth of twenty—a well-matched pair. The girl was beautifully formed, with bright dark eyes and rippling ebony hair and satin skin, not lighted up with roses but glowing all through its pearly grays with a rich, warm life; the man was fair and slender, his mouth firm-set, yet tender in expression, his forehead high and noble, his eyes both sweet and thoughtful.

One bright spring evening Ethel sat awaiting her lover in a room which overlooked the lawn. The French window stood open, for, although it was early in the season, the air was particularly warm and balmy—and her sight took in the evergreen hedges, the arching elms and glimpses of the distant road where, now and then, a flying carriage passed.

The quiet, the balmy air and the sweet contentment of her thoughts had lulled her senses into rest. Her eyelids drooped. She had passed into that blissful state between sleeping and waking in which outward sights and sounds and inward reveries are strangely blended, when she suddenly became aware that the murmuring of voices which reached her ears was a real sound, and lifting her lashes, saw two figures across the hedges, a stalwart negro and a mulatto woman with a yellow cotton cloth wrapped about her head; then she heard the man say:

"That is Mr. Raymond's daughter," and then, broad awake, wondered whether or no she had been dreaming, for there was neither sight nor sound save the accustomed trees and grass hedges, and the low murmuring of a light wind among the leaves. The woman's face, eager, large-eyed, barbarically handsome, set off with the glitter of the sun-touched turban and great hoops of gold in the ears, had vanished as if into thin air.

Later on, Ethel sat at her piano with Walter beside her, gently touching the keys, when Mrs. Raymond rose from the easy chair in which she sat near the window, with a frightened gesture, pointing to the hedges and crying out,

"Oh, Ethel, Ethel, what is that? Look! look! tell me it is fancy!"

Ethel started to her feet. The radiance of the moonlight streamed over lawn and hedges, and glimmered through the arching branches of the elms and the swaying tendrils of the vines. All was quiet and peaceful. Were there two dark shadows just thrown athwart the wall behind the furthest hedges? Ethel looked again and shook her head.

"I see nothing, mother. I did fancy there were two colored people on the grounds a while ago. What was it you saw?"

"Oh, Ethel!" Mrs. Raymond cried out then, "I am very ill. Save me!"

She wrung her hands in a strange, irresolute way, and flinging them above her head, fell, fainting, to the floor. They hurried to her side and she was soon restored. There was nothing the matter, she said, only a little weakness. She had no idea what ailed her, yet she was very pale, and trembling from head to foot.

The next day Mrs. Raymond was ill with a nervous headache and so continued. A kind of depression seemed to have taken possession of her which baffled medical aid and every care. She kept to her room almost constantly.

It was during these days of sickness that Ethel, hearing a ring at the door-bell and voices in the hall, inquired of Mrs. Raymond's maid who lingered in the passage, who had called.

"A poor woman to see your ma," said the girl.

"You told her mamma was ill, did you not?" asked Ethel.

"Yes, Miss Ethel," said the maid, "but I had Mrs. Raymond's orders to show any one up to her room who called—any poor person, that is."

"It must be some mistake," said Ethel, wondering not a little. "I think you must have misunderstood mamma's orders."

"It's no mistake, Miss Ethel," said the girl, bridling. "These were your ma's decided or-

ders, if you'll excuse me for seeming to contradict."

Ethel standing, holding open the door, still doubtful what course to take, saw a slouching figure stealing down the stairs, a woman in shabby, ragged garments, with a long, black hood, a coarse blanket shawl and tattered shoes. It was just growing dusk, and the stranger's face was turned to the wall, but Ethel noticed her shuffling gait and general air of squalor.

She made no further comment, but wondered inwardly what freak her mother had taken, and was even alarmed as to the state of Mrs. Raymond's brain.

"Eunice," she called out after the girl, who was ascending the stairs, "if any one calls for mamma, let me see them first."

"Yes, Miss Ethel," answered Eunice in a demure tone, but with the faintest perceptible shrug of her shoulders.

CHAPTER III.

MRS. RAYMOND'S SECRET.

It was a dreary, drizzling day in the early spring which had been unusually bright and forward, and the Raymonds sat at breakfast. It was Mrs. Raymond's first appearance for several days. She looked up as her husband rose.

"Angus," said she, "let me have some money."

"Certainly, Mrs. Raymond," he answered; "but you will not want it to-day."

"I must have it this morning, if possible, to do some really necessary shopping."

She said this with some show of eager interest, a faint flush of color dyeing her white cheek, and Mr. Raymond caught the look with surprise.

"Here are fifty dollars; will that do?" he asked, opening his bulky pocket-book, "or will you have a check for a larger amount, or, still better, send the bills to me."

"No—yes," said Mrs. Raymond, fluttered and hesitating; "that will do quite well."

She stretched out her hand.

"But," he added, speaking slowly and keeping the notes between his fingers, "I hope you do not mean to go out to-day. The weather is very inclement."

"Oh, yes, Angus; it will do me good."

Apparently pleased at this unusual token of consideration on her husband's part, she looked up with a smile that made her face almost beautiful, but met no answering smile, and the light slowly faded, leaving only the old careworn expression and the feverish eagerness which was quite new.

Just at that moment a servant announced "Dr. Phillips."

"Show him in here," said Mr. Raymond, and the physician entered, smiling blandly, stepping softly, wearing the impression of his mission as a mantle.

"Good-morning, Mr. Raymond," he whispered; "good-morning, ladies. Ah! our patient is breakfasting with her family! How does she find her appetite?"

"She talks of going out to-day," broke in Mr. Raymond.

"My dear madam," cried the doctor, in consternation, "I beg of you do not think of such a thing. It would be suicide, absolute suicide. A breath of this chilly air might have the most disastrous effects."

Mr. Raymond mechanically stuffed the notes which he still held back into his pocket-book.

"Good-morning," said he. "Excuse me, Dr. Phillips, as I have an appointment. Stop for a chat with the ladies, and, Ethel, let the Dr. taste some of that new sillery."

He turned to go, while Dr. Phillips took his place beside Ethel, who was leaning over her canary's cage at the window and commenced conversing with her in a low tone.

"Angus," whispered Mrs. Raymond, glancing furtively toward the two at the window.

Her husband bent toward her and looking down impatiently, with an air suggestive of the hat and coat he was anxious to don, and the poor woman, nervously sensitive to every look and gesture of his, could scarcely articulate her wish.

"I would like to have the money all the same, dear," she said, timidly. "Of course I will not go out, if you do not wish it."

"Well, well," said her husband, smiling as if to say, "Of course it was the money. What else should she want?" and laid the bills in her hand.

"And, Angus—"

"What, Mrs. Raymond?"

"Kiss me!"

The husband looked toward his daughter and the physician whose backs were still turned away, bent and gave his wife a hasty kiss on the cheek, and walked away, looking as shame-faced as such a pompous man could look.

Mrs. Raymond sighed. There was no one to hear her, and, if there had been, a sigh from her lips would scarcely have awakened question or surprise.

"Mother," said Ethel, after the physician's departure, "let me go shopping for you. I'll do my very best."

"No, thank you, Ethel; another day will do."

All the morning, Mrs. Raymond kept her room, and toward afternoon Ethel met Eunice upon the stairs, apparently prepared to leave the house.

"Are you going out Eunice?" she asked, pleasantly.

"Yes, miss. Your ma wants rest. She gave me leave for all day and wishes not to be disturbed."

The girl nodded and went her way, Ethel, after practicing her last new music, went up with the intention of peeping into her mother's room to assure herself of her comfort.

The door did not yield to her touch. She knocked and received no answer, then retreated softly, and, ensconced in the quiet drawing-room, fell a dreaming over some sweet romance.

An hour passed; two; it was growing dusk, and Ethel aroused herself and went to Mrs. Raymond's room once more. Again she knocked without receiving an answer. She listened. There was no sound within. She called softly without result. Her mother was usually a light sleeper and Ethel grew alarmed.

She stooped and found that the key-hole was vacant, then hastily determined that she would cause no disturbance, but find out for herself if anything were wrong. And first, how should she open the door? Perhaps the key of her own room would answer. She procured it, with a sigh of relief, she turned it in the lock, entered and found an empty bed.

She then commenced a search throughout the house. She inquired of the servants and all told the same story, that Mrs. Raymond was ill and had given orders not to be disturbed.

Ethel made no remark, but re-locked the door, replaced the key in her own room and sat down to think the matter over. She remembered the conversation at the breakfast table. That Mrs. Raymond had gone out was plain; also that she desired the fact to remain a secret.

Her business must be urgent, indeed, or, could it be, Ethel wondered with a shudder, that her brain was affected, that some caprice had taken possession of her mind and caused her thus to steal out in secret? Then she remembered with a start, that she had seen the coachman lounging in the garden. The carriage then was not out! Mr. Raymond's buggy, he himself had in use. It seemed impossible that the invalid should have gone out in the storm, unsheltered, yet what else remained to believe?

But, whether the dreadful calamity of insanity had fallen upon the sufferer, or she had, in reality, some concern of her own which she did not choose to divulge, Ethel decided that her best course was to keep the matter quiet, if possible, and guard her mother from all curiosity.

The evening fell. Ethel looked from the windows uneasily. She still restrained her feelings, although with the greatest difficulty, and, after wandering uneasily about the house, went again to the deserted room. This time the door yielded to her touch, and there lay the invalid, her cheeks flushed, her eyes shining with the glazed look that fever brings, her hands restlessly clutching at the bed-clothes.

"Ethel," she said, feebly, "I am so glad you came in. Eunice has left her wet cloak and shoes here. It was very careless, but do not say anything to her. Just have them carried to the servants' closet, please."

Ethel lifted the cloak still covered with rain-drops and the dripping umbrella from a towel-rack where they stood, then stooped and gathered up a pair of coarse shoes and two stockings awkwardly bundled together and exceedingly muddled. As she did so, the name "Eunice Beebe" stamped upon the stockings caught her eye.

They were truly Eunice's garments. Ethel stepping outside the door, summoned her maid.

"Take these to the servants' closet," she said, "and tell Eunice I would like to see her a moment."

"Eunice is not home, Miss Ethel."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure; she will not be home till nine."

and we are taking dinner. She is not in the house."

Ethel pondered over this new mystery, and the more she pondered the more puzzled she became. She recalled again and again all the circumstances of her mother's illness, trying in vain to find some solution of the enigma.

She kept close watch for many days, but noted no remarkable change, no peculiar sign of aberration. Mrs. Raymond was even no worse in bodily condition. She resumed her customary occupations, or, rather, her sole occupation, the endless embroidery.

The summer days rolled by, and Ethel, wrapped in thoughts of love and happiness, had almost forgotten her fears when they were all recalled by a new incident.

As she sat on her father's knee, playfully caressing his hair and mustache, he startled her by a question.

"Ethel, what does your mother do with her money?"

"Money, papa! I suppose she buys clothes, dresses, gloves, and such things."

"Has she bought two hundred dollars' worth of garments in the last two months? I know you have," he added, patting her cheek, "but your mother does not seem to have anything new. Am I right?"

"Ladies' gloves and shoes, and such things, cost a great deal, father; but I do not know of anything new—no hats, or dresses, or laces. Why do you ask?"

Instead of answering her question, Mr. Raymond sat in a brown study.

"Does it strike you," he went on presently, "that she seems to have something on her mind?"

"I was afraid so, papa, a while ago, but I have seen nothing to alarm me lately."

Ethel hesitated, remembering the singular escapade of the wet spring day, but decided to say nothing for her father's sake. If trouble were coming to him, it would come without aid from her.

"She wanted another hundred, this morning, and seemed to feel badly because I did not have it about me—so very badly that it struck me as being curious. Why would not my name do as well?"

He said this as if communing with himself, then asked Ethel:

"Does she go out much?"

"Very little, papa."

"No new dresses, no jewelry, no laces. No investments of any kind. Can it be charity?"

"Perhaps so. Mother has no work of any kind done outside of the house, but I have heard of a poor person going to her room several times when she was too ill to receive callers."

"I know she has not been to church for several weeks," said Mr. Raymond; musingly; "I do not believe in indiscriminate charity, but why should she call it shopping? It passes my comprehension."

That same evening, Ethel was summoned to her mother's room to find her panting heavily, her lips parched and dry, her hands feverish, her brow hot.

"Eunice," she said, as her daughter entered, "you may go. Ethel, come here, child."

Ethel bent over the pillow and took her mother's hand which was hastily withdrawn.

She then drew up a chair and commanding her features to perfect calmness, prepared to listen.

Once or twice the poor woman's lips parted and no sound issued from them. At last she spoke.

"Ethel, you promised me long ago you would not marry until I wished it."

"Yes, mother, and I will keep my word."

"I release you. Let it be soon. I—I—think I may not live long and I wish to see you—settled."

"Mother, you are not so ill, so very ill as that."

"Who can tell? Can it be very soon?"

"The next time Walter asks me I will set the day. I think he must be tired of coaxing."

"Can it be in one week?"

"In one week! Hardly. It will take me some time to prepare."

Mrs. Raymond lifted her head from her pillow in the earnestness of her appeal.

"Let it be soon, Ethel, soon, soon!"

She sunk back completely exhausted and panting heavily.

Ethel sighed, then forced a smile.

"Mother, you must be well and present at my wedding if you want me to marry. Now promise."

"Anything. Only let it be soon."

The words sounded like a wail of agony.

CHAPTER IV.

A THUNDERBOLT.

THE lovers were parting in the hush and darkness of a beautiful summer evening. Hand in hand they stood, while the stars shimmered through the leafy elms like so many watchful eyes, smiling and winking over a new discovery. Ethel had given her promise at last. The seal of the promise was upon her lips when a fearful cry arose—a sound that curdled her blood, and, in another instant, a form stole behind them, from the open door it seemed to both—a woman's figure. Ethel remembered it well, a living woman, phantom or dream whichever it might be that had stood before her in the twilight, months before. The dark rolling eyes, the bright turban, the dusky face passed close beside her swiftly.

"Who is that?" asked Walter Merritt, but Ethel flew up the central staircase, crying out in terror.

"Mamma, mamma!" and followed by half a dozen female servants.

Poor Mrs. Raymond lay upon her bed, snowy pale, wringing her hands in a feeble way, and moaning as if in bitter anguish and glaring at the door, but she gave no answer to the questions showered upon her save that she was very ill, that she was quite sure she should never recover, and, looking up into her daughter's face, she whispered piteously:

"Soon, Ethel, for your own sake!"

Ethel nodded and stooped to kiss the white lips, and then leaving Eunice beside the bed, went down to say a farewell word to Walter.

"Mamma seems very ill," she said.

"And who was it that we saw?" asked Walter Merritt. "I was sure she came down the stairs."

The same thought was in Ethel's mind, yet she stammered as she answered that she did not know. For a moment she harbored the idea of telling all her doubts and fears concerning her mother to this man to whom she had promised herself, yet some instinctive feeling restrained her.

"What is in your mind, Ethel?" he asked, anxiously.

"Nothing but anxiety for mamma," she replied.

He looked at her, but half satisfied, drawing her face into the light that fell from the open door. She felt that he read something of the conflict that was going on within her, little knowing how he would interpret it, at a not far-distant day.

The wedding cake was frosted. The cook had finished it with her own hands—a wonderful structure, emblematic of all sublunary bliss. The servants crowded around to admire it as well as the confections and delicacies that flanked it on every side.

Above stairs, the prospective bridesmaids vaunted the beauties of the bridal robes, chatting and laughing and fluttering around the girl who was to be a bride on the morrow.

As for Ethel, light of heart though she was, full of happy dreams, she almost longed to be alone. Her happiness seemed too pure and sweet to be mingled with millinery and gossip, yet she laughed with the rest.

From the group of gay beauties around her, Ethel's eyes wandered across the open lawn in sight of the windows, dreamily searching the distance, and, suddenly, fixed themselves upon a distant object, only a black, moving speck far down the distant road, a horseman, as it proved, and she watched him, little dreaming what burden he brought to her—little dreaming that aught could dash her full cup from her lips. Poor Ethel!

Nearer and nearer. Only a plain little man with an over neatly-fitting suit of black garments and a grave, parchment-colored face, yet, as he drew rein at her father's gate, Ethel shuddered.

"What is the matter?" she said only half aloud. "I am frightened!"

And burst into tears. There was sudden consternation in the room then, although Ethel laughed and said she must be nervous. The girls crowded around her with a hundred questions, brought water and cologne, and bathed her temples and chafed her hands.

"It is nothing," she faltered. "I know that father is in the house and mother is no worse, but, somehow, the man's face frightened me. Oh, Walter! Can anything be the matter with Walter?"

"I am afraid you all think me very silly," she added, a moment after, wiping away a sudden shower of tears.

They assured her they did not, and after a few moments one of their number went in search of Mr. Raymond, in hopes of ascertaining that Ethel's sudden fright was utterly groundless.

The fair missionary paused at the study door and knocked. The sound of subdued voices within suddenly ceased and Mr. Raymond himself appeared, looking strangely agitated. His visitor faltered, scarcely knowing how to represent her case, but she succeeded at last in stammering out:

"Ethel was a little alarmed, sir, and wished me to ask if anything was wrong."

"In reference to my caller?" suggested Mr. Raymond.

"Yes, sir."

"A gentleman, a lawyer who has called on private business, tell her," he said, and closed the door.

So the ambassador went back with the message and quieted Ethel's fears.

Shortly after the merry girls sat round a tea-table spread upon the lawn, and when the feast was over departed with mutual plans for the morrow, leaving Ethel to herself.

Mr. Raymond still lingered with his visitor. Ethel stole up to her mother's room.

"Will you have a light, mamma?" she asked.

"No, Ethel."

Mrs. Raymond slipped her wasted hand into Ethel's. It was an unusual action and met with a warm response.

"Ethel, you will be married to-morrow?" she asked, in a feeble tone.

"Yes, mother, to-morrow."

"And nothing has happened yet?"

"Happened? No, mamma."

"Ethel," she whispered, then paused, and the girl heard the sick woman's heart-beats in the silence.

"What, mamma? I am listening."

"If I should die to-night—"

"You will not die," cried Ethel, shuddering.

"God only knows. If I should die, let the wedding come off. Let no one know until it is over."

"What has frightened you, mother dear? Do you feel worse?"

"Do not ask me, child, but promise."

"I cannot promise. Please do not make me feel so unhappy to-night."

The woman sighed a weary sigh. When next she spoke, it seemed as though she had forgotten even the existence of her companion.

She murmured softly:

"Angus! Angus! I loved you so! Shall I never have one look, one word? My God! How I have sinned and suffered for your sake—for fear of you."

Ethel's blood curdled as she listened. What mystery was this? She trembled to know that her fears were indeed true, and all her woman's heart went out in pity to the suffering, dying creature moaning over her wasted love.

There was a sound of footsteps on the stairs and Mr. Raymond flung wide the door. The two women started in surprise. They could not see his face, only the outlines of his figure and another smaller one behind him like a shadow.

"A light!" he cried, in a low, hoarse voice, and Ethel flew to strike one.

Four great wax candles burst into flame and revealed the room and its occupants. Mr. Raymond closed the door and turned the key. The stranger took his place at the foot of the bed with an anxious expression, pressing his forefingers together and rising on his toes in unison. He was the first to speak.

"I am afraid the lady is very ill."

"Mr. Raymond strode to his wife's side. The light shone full on his face, crimsoned with emotion. Ethel, from the other side, sitting, holding Mrs. Raymond's hand, looked up in terror.

" Sylvia Raymond, whose child is she?"

"Not yours, not mine," his wife wailed, and flung the girl's hand from her, then rose with a suddenly acquired strength from her recumbent position and stretched her arms toward her husband.

It was an awful sight to see. Her face with coming death upon it, and bitter, mortal anguish. His full of loathing—stern, fierce, utterly cruel.

"Angus, I meant to tell you all these years, I never dared. Look, read, in—my—desk—"

"Does this man lie, and those who sent him, or is it true?"

"True! Oh, Angus, but I—am—dying."

"Die, then, and God's curse rest upon you and crush you in your grave."

"Angus! my Angus!"

"Papa!"

"No father of yours, girl! Let me never see your face again."

With wild eyes Ethel looked upon the scene. The infuriated man was choking and purple with passion. The woman had fallen back upon her pillow, her eyes starting from their sockets, her feeble hands clutching at the air. The little dapper lawyer at the bed's foot was still slowly poisoning himself in air, his forefingers together, his eyebrows elevated, glancing with a scared expression from one to the other, of the assembled group.

"Angus," the woman cried, "one word of forgiveness; I have loved you all these years."

"You have cheated me all these years," said her husband, his hands clenched, his teeth firm-set, and sunk, exhausted by the excess of his passion, into a chair.

Then silence fell. Only the dying woman's labored breath disturbed it. Her husband's head sunk upon his breast. The lawyer still remained at the bed's foot, and Ethel sat motionless, a statue of despairing horror.

At length there came a gurgle, a harsh rattle, a long, low groan, the poor, thin hands gave one convulsive motion and fell.

"She is dead," said the lawyer; and rising, blindly staggering like a drunken man, the merchant stumbled with wild, disordered motions from the room. With a rigid face, Ethel rose and forced the death-stiffened hands down on the pulseless breast, then laid her fingers across the staring eyes.

"Will you tell me what has happened?" she whispered to the lawyer.

"Yes, my poor girl, I will," he answered.

Then she rung for aid and there were hurried footsteps and sounds of wonder and alarm, and others came to do the last sad duties to the dead.

Out of the chamber Ethel passed with drooping head, touching the lawyer as she went. He followed her into the library on the floor below, and, seated in a chair which she placed for him, looked nervously at the pattern of the carpet, as though it were a geometrical problem he could not solve. Ethel, trembling in every limb and ashy pale, took another chair for herself, and spoke in a clear, steady voice. She had nerved herself to the effort.

Mr. —, she hesitated, reminding him that she was unacquainted with his name.

"Wilkins, madam."

"Mr. Wilkins, will you now kindly inform me what calamity has occurred? Will you give me some explanation of the words I heard in the room above?"

"I regret to inform you, my poor girl—in fact, my dear young lady, you are not the daughter of Mr. Raymond, not even, I am sorry to say, the legally adopted daughter."

"Who, then, am I?"

The lawyer wiped his forehead. He looked at the ceiling, at the figures in the carpet, from object to object, in apparent desperation.

He made a gasping effort to speak.

"I—I—cannot tell you," he stammered out at last.

"There is no one else to whom I can go now. I beg of you to let me know all that is in your power."

The stranger shook his head. It was plain his task was more difficult than he had at first supposed.

"I speak," at length he began, "of facts which have yet to be proven in law; but which, nevertheless, are undisputed and capable, as I am well aware, of proof. You—you will not agitate yourself? You—in short, you will not faint?"

"I shall not faint," Ethel said with a sigh. "Go on."

"You have, legally speaking, no father."

Ethel's face darkened. Her teeth were firmly set, her lips livid; but her eyes looked straight forward, clear and bright.

"And my mother?"

"Your mother? In fact, my poor child, your ma is, in short, not a desirable party, not a parent one would naturally wish to claim or to be claimed by, as the present case stands."

The lawyer rose. It was plain he found his task altogether too difficult. He took a step toward the door. Ethel also stepped forward and placed her hand upon the lock.

"I see you have something more to tell me. Let me know it now, I implore—I beg of you!"

The lawyer took another step toward the door. He wiped his forehead with a new access of desperation.

"The parent—the person who claims you, who, in fact, brings proof, indisputable proof of her claims, is—a—Southern mulatto woman. If Mr. Raymond should conclude to dispute the

guardianship, he may, probably, be successful, but the fact of parentage is indisputable."

The last words died, unheeded, on Ethel's ear. Her hand dropped powerless at her side. Mr. Wilkins made his egress in haste. The girl stood, staring vacantly before her, motionless, stricken with horror. Presently she muttered:

"It cannot be! It is not true!"

And, dragging herself as though her limbs were a leaden weight, went slowly up the stairs.

"In her desk," she muttered, half aloud, as though her memory needed words to lay hold on. Into the silent room she went. A strange woman sat by the bedside, where lay the still, white figure. Ethel shuddered. A small rose-wood writing desk stood in the further corner. She went toward and lifted it bodily, with all the strength she could muster, feeling, even through the strange stagnation that had come upon her, the horror of active exertion which one who is unaccustomed to the awful presence, must always feel in the chamber of death.

She opened the door of a small inner chamber and there set down her burden, then got one of the tall wax candles which still burned where she had lighted them in the early evening, and placed it on a stand near by. She found that the desk was locked. She longed to tear it apart. It was a wild, insane thought she knew. She made an inward effort at restraint, made an effort to keep down the choking sensation in her throat. The key must be found, the contents of the desk examined. She remembered the key which belonged to it, a brass one, curiously formed. She remembered, too, having seen a small bunch of keys hanging beside the mirror in Mrs. Raymond's room. In a horror of impatience, she discovered that this one was not among them.

A hand touched her arm.

"They told me this would be wanted. It was around her neck," the strange woman said in a sepulchral whisper, thrusting the object of which she was in search into her hand and pointing toward the bed.

Ethel drew a chair before the desk and began examining the contents.

Neat packages of letters side by side, ticketed "From my friend, M. A.," "From Miss B.," "From my mother," "From Angus before marriage," these tattered with much use and tied with a faded blue ribbon. Then bills, petitions, accounts, fresh stationery, and a red leather case. This Ethel opened. It contained the marriage certificate of Angus and Sylvia Raymond, a register of the birth of Ethel, daughter of Angus and Sylvia Raymond, dated just seventeen years before. There was beside, a sealed envelope, inscribed:

"To my husband, to be read after my death."

Ethel gave one final glance at the interior of the desk, then closed it and hurried from the room by an outer door, with the packet in her hands. Once in the outer passage, she paused. Could she go to the man who, until to-day, had been her loving and beloved father, who, to-day, had told her he never wanted to see her face again?

She hesitated and lingered. A man-servant passed her in the hall.

"John," she asked, "where is Mr. Raymond?"

"In his study, Miss Ethel," the man answered.

She went down another flight of stairs, for the study was on the lowest floor, and tapped at the door. There was some sound. It might have been a response or a groan. She scarcely knew which, but she entered the room. Mr. Raymond leaned with his elbows on the long study-table, his head buried in his hands. He looked up at the sound of Ethel's entrance, and his face was a fearful sight to see. Ethel's innermost soul was moved to pity to find so great a change in a few short hours. She was about to say the word "Papa," but checked herself. Distinct and terrible came the remembrance of his words:

"No father of yours, girl. Let me never see your face again."

"Sir—Mr. Raymond, I have brought a paper I think you must wish to read," and she held the envelope toward him, some faint, vague hope that it might contain some alleviation of this great misfortune that had fallen upon her, stirring in her bosom.

Mr. Raymond started to his feet and almost shouted in his vehemence:

"If it is written by that woman, take it away. Read it, you, if you care to know the story of your disgraceful birth."

Ethel looked at him. With her, the love of her life-time could not be wiped away by the

knowledge an hour had brought, not even by cruelty to herself or the dead.

She looked at him, earnestly. Surely he was distracted with the fearful trouble that had come upon him. Out of pure pity, she forced her lips to say:

"Papa!"

There was no softening in his face.

"Go," he said. "Money you shall have if you want it, but never let me see you or the wench who gave you birth."

Ethel turned and left him.

"Oh, Walter!" she moaned, as she passed through the lighted passages and stairways to her own room, "will you turn against me too?"

She tore apart the seal of the envelope, letting fall a closely written letter.

A strange feeling came to her now, as if she were separated from herself, as if the person on whom the misfortune had fallen were the heroine of some romance, which interested her in a far-off manner, and so, calmly and quietly, she turned page after page, and read the words which were meant for Angus Raymond's eyes.

CHAPTER V.

THE LETTER AND A NEW APPEARANCE.

THUS it ran:

"DEAR ANGUS: When you read this I shall be sleeping in my grave. I know that I have failed to make you happy, but I have loved you as few women love. Since the first year of our marriage I have had a fearful secret to carry about with me, grief and remorse that have crushed me down and made me the unhappy creature I have seemed."

"Let me tell you now. Oh, that it were truly now! That I could lay my head upon your breast and speak to you with my living voice! But I do not dare."

"Our little Ethel, the daughter of our love, died, died by my hand, though I would have given my own life to save hers. I poisoned her, by accident. I was wild with grief and when the first anguish of my own despair was over, I did not desire to let you know the truth. I tried to write it again and again, and failed. Would God that I had summoned courage then! But I knew or thought that your grief would be as great as mine."

"The girl whom you have petted and loved and fondled before my eyes is another woman's child, and the worst is yet to be told. There came to me in the first weeks of my affliction, a mulatto woman with an infant in her arms. She told me a story of its parentage which I then believed. Its mother, she said, was a lady who had once been rich and was dying now in poverty."

"I took the little creature to my breast. It seemed then, as, indeed, it has proved, that it might take the place to you of our little Ethel, that you might never know your loss, and I adopted it. There were no witnesses, no legal proceedings. Only a few words passed between the woman and myself."

"Even in those days, Angus, I had discovered that you could be stern, and I dreaded your reproaches more than those of my own conscience. How little I knew of the dreadful end!"

"When the time came that she was asked in marriage, I knew that the truth ought to be divulged, and tried to gain courage, urging her to delay the event. It was a fatal delay."

"A few months ago the woman who intrusted the child to my care came to me here, in your house, and told me all the truth. The child was her own. You can guess all that that involves; but she has ample means to prove her statement. The very doctor who attended me at St. Augustine certifies to the child's birth, and to having seen it shortly after, in my care, supposing me to have purchased it."

"I bought the woman off, for a time, with money which you were loth to give. I saw that my resources were failing, that discovery must come; yet, more and more, I felt that I could not own the deception that I had practiced upon you."

"My only hope now was in a speedy marriage, for the woman plainly wanted nothing but money, and a husband's protection would have set aside all other claims. For the child's sake, whom I have wronged so bitterly, I trust it may not now be too late, for, failing in her extortion, knowing her legal rights, the mother will resort to law. You will know best how to stop proceedings."

"Forgive me, Angus, for the murder of your child. When I am gone, forgive me if you can, that my sorrow has embittered your life and mine. Pity me, just a little, sweet husband! Remember the dear old times when you and I were lovers, and, in the other world, if God gives me leave, I will think of you and pray for you unceasingly, until your hour comes."

"Good-by, my own dear love! I am glad to die. I think you will love and pity me just a little when I am gone."

"Let them bury your letters with your little wife, you used to call her, SYLVIA."

"Poor woman!" said Ethel, as the paper dropped from her hand and her eye moistened. Then she started up like a wild creature.

"My God!" she cried, "and this is true, and this is I!"

She snatched the candle by which she had been reading and held it before the mirror.

"Is it stamped on my face?" she asked, scanning her features narrowly, and then she sat down and quenched the flame with a quick, fierce breath.

"It is there! it is there!" she moaned, "and I have never guessed it, never known it."

Through the darkness she paced the floor with frantic steps, up and down, up and down. She tore the lace and the chain she wore from around her throat, for they seemed to choke her, and cast them on the carpet at her feet. Some one knocked at the door and asked her if she would take some refreshment.

The words fell, empty sounds upon her ear. It seemed as if years had passed over her head when the early sunlight, struggling through the closed shutters, fell upon her haggard, ashen face and bloodshot eyes.

"I am the girl," she said to herself, "whom Angus Raymond called his daughter. I am the woman Walter Merritt loved. Can it not be the same as if the truth had never come to light?"

Then she cried with bitter anguish:

"No, never again!" and paced the floor with wilder speed.

On the very day of Mrs. Raymond's death, there sailed into New York harbor a vessel from New Orleans, and, among the first passengers to leave its deck was a gentleman dressed in luxurious summer clothing, a man with an air of ease and elegance about him, dark-skinned, black-browed, graceful, scarcely middle-aged and extremely handsome, if one might judge by the glances which followed him as he passed through the throng.

This individual, though evidently of foreign birth, was apparently familiar with the city. He walked along carelessly, looking from side to side until a drug store caught his eye. He entered, and calling for a glass of soda-water, at the same time turned the leaves of a city directory which lay upon the counter. As he tossed down the foaming beverage he ran his finger lightly down the page to which he had turned, and the name on which he lighted was that of "Angus Raymond."

His next proceeding was to hail a cab which stood near. After a short drive he alighted at a business-house, displaying the words, "Raymond and Co.," across its front. This place he entered. In the office were a number of clerks hard at work, with pen and ink and huge books of accounts, and one or two men busily engaged in conversation of a serious and mercantile nature.

One of these latter stepped up to the stranger and politely inquired his errand. "Will you kindly inform me," he said—his voice had a very sweet intonation, and his words a slightly foreign accent—"Will you kindly inform me of the easiest way to reach the private residence of Mr. Raymond, and, also, if I shall be likely to find him at home?"

"You will, most probably, find him at home," replied the clerk, and proceeded to give explicit directions by which to reach the mansion.

"May I ask if his family are enjoying good health?" was the next question.

"Mrs. Raymond," replied the other, "has been for some time an invalid, but Miss Ethel is well."

He added with a laugh:

"Perhaps you are not aware that she is to be married to-morrow!"

The stranger gave an almost imperceptible start, but his voice betrayed no emotion.

"To-morrow? Indeed?" was his comment, "and Mr. Raymond himself is well, you say?"

"Very well, sir, and most probably at home."

So the short interview ended. A cab was again hailed. It bore the stranger through the city, up into the suburbs, out upon the road where Mr. Raymond's mansion stood, and was then dismissed.

The gentleman, so newly arrived in the city, was certainly very anxious regarding the health of the Raymonds, although he did not call upon them then; but of various maid and men-servants in the locality, he made similar inquiries to those of the afternoon, and at last the news which had not yet spread very far, of Mrs. Raymond's sudden demise, came to his hearing.

"Then to-morrow is not Miss Ethel's wedding-day," he muttered, with evident rejoicing, as he went his way down the broad road, under the sweet-smelling locust trees and the starlight.

CHAPTER VI.

SON AND MOTHER.

THE same sun that shone upon Ethel's haggard face, lighted up her lover's, glowing with a bridegroom's joy. Only a mile apart, yet

separated by a great gulf were the two who had, this day, hoped to be one.

With a light step and a lighter heart, Walter Merritt entered the breakfast-room. On its very threshold he paused, struck with an icy chill. Was it in the air of the room, in the faces of its occupants, this sudden premonition of ill? He could not say.

His father, mother and three sisters sat at the board. He looked from one to the other uneasily, and each avoided his glance. He sat down. There was silence. No servant attended them as usual. It was plain some strange and startling event had occurred. Before any one had spoken, a servant tapped and handed in a note. Walter gave one glance at the delicate handwriting he knew so well. It was from his Ethel, and he hurried from the room to peruse it. By some mysterious process his mind connected this unexpected message with the solemn countenances around him.

He entered the library, which was just opposite the breakfast-room, and there paced restlessly for a few moments, then tore the envelope apart.

These were the words that met his eye:

"DEAR WALTER: mine no longer! Our dream of happiness is over! The news that is blazoned in the papers to-day, is true—every miserable word of it. Try to forget
ETHEL."

This to the man who was to have been a bridegroom before the sunset! What wonder his mind, so utterly unprepared, was slow to take it in! With faltering steps he returned to the breakfast-room, to find the family in the same attitudes as before, and to spread the sheet before his mother's eyes. She read it without sign of surprise, and passed it to her husband. One of the girls stole behind her father's chair and glanced at it, then beckoned to the others to follow her from the room.

"What is it, mother?" Walter Merritt asked.

"What does it mean?" His mother silently handed him the morning paper which had lain upon the table, pointing to a paragraph therein.

He laid it down, keeping his hand upon it, and looking up with an expression that stayed his sisters, who were at that moment stealing from the room.

"Whatever it may be," he said, distinctly and clearly, "it is nothing that can change my mind about Ethel. It is no fault of hers. Of that I am sure."

"Walter!" cried Florence, a haughty looking blonde, the oldest of the sisters, with a sudden mounting of color to her face. "You could never be so wild! You would not marry her, now?"

"Not marry Ethel! If she will have me, I will marry her this very day."

"Read it before you speak again, Walter," said his mother.

The paragraph which had already awakened the wonder of the neighborhood, which had stricken a new chill to Ethel's heart, was an ingenious reporter's work, founded partially on truth, in this instance, circumstantial and clear. It ran to the effect that a mulatto woman who had once been a slave, and feared the same fate for her daughter, had smothered her maternal instincts for the sake of her child, and adopted it to the wife of Angus Raymond, a well-known New York merchant, and subsequently, having thriven by her industry in a state of freedom, wished to reclaim her child. The interest of the story lay in the fact that the child had grown up into a beautiful young lady, fair enough to pass for a dark brunette, who was wholly ignorant of her origin.

There followed much speculation as to whether the mother would succeed in asserting her claims during the trial which was about to occur.

The paper dropped from Walter Merritt's hand. Slowly the pinkish color mounted to the roots of his hair.

"She says it is true. Can she mean it?" he cried out.

Mrs. Merritt drew near and laid her hand on her son's head.

"My poor boy! What will you do?"

The tears stood in her motherly eyes. Florence Merritt went back to the table.

"Walter," she said, "tell me you did not mean it. You would not marry her?"

All eyes were fixed upon him, awaiting his answer with breathless interest. His father's face showed plainly that a moment's hesitation would have called forth scathing wrath, but he held silence.

Walter groaned.

"Of course it could not be," he said. "Anything but that. But, it cannot be true."

The sisters left the room to talk the news

over, and Walter sat, in dumb despair, with his parents. He did not show his sorrow in any wild ebullition. The blow was deep and deadly, and so it seemed as if he bore it well.

After a time, his mother spoke:

"Mrs. Raymond died last night."

Walter's eyes gave sign that he had heard.

"I will go there to-day and see—the girl."

Mr. Merritt now took his departure. All but his mother felt a strange embarrassment before the young man in his trouble, and Walter, on his part, could only speak freely alone with her.

"Oh, mother," he said, "it seems too terrible to believe. I do not realize it yet."

"You must try to bear it as well as you can. Time softens all things. My boy! my poor boy!"

"But how will she bear it?" he said, for the first time realizing the extent of Ethel's misfortune. "I suppose they will be kind to her, and, of course, they must have known it all along. And she—mother, can it be that she knew it?"

Mrs. Merritt glanced over Ethel's note.

"She only says, 'it is true.' Would she not have spoken of the shock, had it been news to her? Well, Walter, she is excusable. She is very young, and in love. Thank God, the knowledge came to you before it was too late!"

"I cannot say amen," Walter broke in, "and yet it would have been very terrible, if I must ever know it. I have kissed her, mother! Her hand has been in mine! What if she had been my wife?"

He buried his head in his hands.

"Where is my Ethel?" he cried out, presently. Then long, low, choking sobs rose from his breast. His mother understood him. The news had utterly obliterated his sweet ideal. The child of the slave might be an object of pity; but not his honored wife, the queen of his adoration. He had no impulse to go and seek her out, to comfort her sorrowing heart. It was as if the grave had closed upon her. A great gulf, indeed, yawned between them. Even her letter lay untouched upon the table, and, after his outburst of sorrow, he rent it in fragments. It was not written by his Ethel.

Mrs. Merritt scarcely knew, until she set about it, what a difficult and delicate task she had undertaken. During the process of dressing for her necessary call at Mr. Raymond's, her feelings underwent a series of revolutions, pity, sympathy almost; then, indignation against the girl who had striven to impose upon her son. The adopted parents, also, she felt were very much to blame.

"And one of them is dead, and my son has yet to seek his wife. Ah! it's a strange world," she sighed. "The girl must understand, once for all, that nothing is to be expected from his compassion. A creature who could assist in such imposture can scarcely be expected to understand a gentleman's feelings. Yet, I hate to go."

The long black streamer flapped lazily in the summer breeze and there were little groups of people gathering around Mr. Raymond's house when Mrs. Merritt reached it.

She pulled the bell and inquired if she might see Miss Raymond, seeing in the servant's face as we all see such things without knowing how, that the news of the day was common property and had been well aired in the kitchen.

Seated in a drawing-room, she awaited the servant's answer, and, in the midst of a troubled reverie, looked up to see Ethel standing before her. A dull despair characterized her face and figure, and every motion, but her natural grace and courtesy remained. There was no cringing in her air. It said, "I have set myself apart from the world," not, "The world has set me apart. I am degraded and the world looks down upon me." It commanded a singular feeling of respect in Mrs. Merritt's mind, and, for the first time, she felt the full awkwardness of the position in which she had placed herself.

"Will you assure your son, for me," Ethel began, without hesitation, "that my adopted parents and myself were alike ignorant of the truth when I engaged myself to him—that whatever wrong has been done him was unintentional? He will scarcely care to receive a message of respect and esteem that can never change."

"Perhaps it will be better to dispense with all communication," Mrs. Merritt began, pained and miserably conscious that no proper or dignified course of action was consonant with her true feelings. Somehow, she felt, she ought to express her compassion; but she could scarcely do so without expressing, also, that the being before her was a creature in the depths of degradation, and the presence of that being was one which utterly forbade such expression.

"You will be provided for, in these new circumstances, I trust," she faltered.

Ethel arose.

"Please excuse me from further conversation, madam," she said. "I appreciate, fully, the kindness of your motives, but I am agitated and quite unable to control myself. I have no desire for any communication with your son, but this—I should like him to know—I think it will do him good to know, that—the discovery has been as great a surprise to me as to him."

Mrs. Merritt hesitated, deliberating what to say next, noting for the first time, the singular complexion which had passed for that of a brunette—the long, almond-shaped finger-nails, intensely white at the roots, the crisp waves of dark hair, and wondering that they had never struck her before, in the same light as now, that they had never suggested to any one, the faintest suspicion of her origin.

"It seems so easy to believe, now that the clue is given," she said to herself, and her cheek burned to think that her own son had caressed this creature of tainted blood.

There was nothing, indeed, to be said. Mrs. Merritt arose, only too glad to escape. Ethel spoke a farewell, somewhat abruptly and with a proud inclination of her head.

"Good-morning, madam."

"Good-morning," Mrs. Merritt hesitated, feeling that her hesitation was an insult, and faltered out miserably: "Miss Raymond."

CHAPTER VII.

OUT IN THE WORLD.

THREE dreadful days of desolation followed for Ethel. Alone in her own room, with no human being near, she suffered unutterable anguish. Sleep did not visit her eyelids, save a few fitful moments of unconsciousness that came upon her suddenly, when, exhausted with her restless pacing, she was compelled to fall upon a chair or bed. Food was brought to her of which she ate a few mouthfuls mechanically, and, all this time, no word from the lover who had claimed her heart's devotion but a few short days before, and this through no sin of hers.

The funeral sermon was preached. The house was crowded to overflowing with neighbors and friends, and strangers, who, but for the story connected with the family, would never have entered. Ethel sat quiet, utterly emotionless to all outward appearances. Gossips whispered that her black dress was not "mourning," but only one from her usual wardrobe which she had adopted as suited to the occasion, and the fact bore its significance to them.

Mr. Raymond listened with due decorum to the service. There was, however, a strange look under his calm demeanor, which only an experienced eye could have understood.

Dr. Phillips looked anxious and gave him a hint that he must take care of himself, when, before the obsequies, he took the opportunity to exchange a word of greeting with him.

It was an occasion of peculiar embarrassment. A few of those good, well-meaning, obtuse persons, who fail to take in such a situation as the present, consoled with Ethel and Mr. Raymond in the ordinary fashion, and so covered the confusion of those whose curiosity had brought them hither, but whose good taste made them wish themselves away.

It was over. The long, solemn procession departed, the clergyman, friends, neighbors and strangers. Among the last to linger was the gentleman who had recently arrived in the New Orleans steamer, who had expressed such peculiar interest in the welfare of the family. All through the ceremony he kept his eyes fixed upon Ethel with a meditative gaze, and when the door closed on the last departure, he still remained upon the grounds, walking leisurely up and down through the shrubbery, switching the well-trimmed hedges with a light cane which he carried.

To Ethel, in her new solitude, there came, out of that dreadful trial, a new state of mind.

"God does not despise me; I do not despise myself," she said. "I have done no crime. He made me and I am His, and no different creature than when they thronged around me because I was Mr. Raymond's daughter. My life is of little value to me without the love of my father, without Walter's love, yet I still have it before me. I will go out into the world, out of his house, who has said he never wished to see my face again. If death comes, well and good; if not, I will see what fate has yet in store for me."

Then she went to her wardrobe and took from it a plain round hat, which she wore for rural walks, and the plainest shawl of her col-

lection, put both on, and, so equipped, stopped for reflection.

Nothing in that house belonged to her by right, yet she felt it a certain justice that she should not go forth empty-handed. Support she would not accept, but the private purse which she still possessed she felt willing to take with her. About one hundred dollars remained. Her valuable jewels she left, keeping only the rings she wore, her engagement ring and the ear-rings and pendants which had been Walter Merritt's gift.

She took one last, lingering look at the wedding dress, the white veil, the beautiful pearls, which she should never wear now.

"Oh, Walter, Walter!" she sobbed; "I could not have forsaken you, yet perhaps you are right. We have been taught that God's will would keep us apart, yet it is the knowledge of the fact and not the fact that separates us, and I feel so like myself."

She ended with a bitter laugh and a look at her mirror.

Down the stairs, out into the open air, she went, stopping to slip beneath the door of Mr. Raymond's study the dead woman's confession, sealed as she had taken it from the desk. Into the afternoon sunshine she passed, caring not who should see or heed her.

She was past that, set apart from her past world. Going. Where? To what? She had not even asked herself the question. From the father who was no longer a father, from the lover who scorned her, from the mother who could be nothing but a horror; that was all she knew.

Leaning against the gate-post of Mr. Raymond's house a stranger watched her going out, the man who had been strolling in the shrubbery for an hour or more. Ethel scarcely knew that she saw him. He came within her vision just as the old familiar trees and houses and glimpses of faces here and there peeping from the windows did. Long afterward she remembered it, his searching eyes fastened upon her, his very attitude, his supple fingers grasping the gate-post. Now he was but one object in a great, meaningless picture.

The sun dazzled her. The air made her dizzy. The ground seemed to tremble beneath her feet and rise and fall in undulating waves, but she trod them down and went on, on toward the great city. Why, she could not have told. She was in no reasoning mood. Her only thoughts away! away!

CHAPTER VIII.

LODGING FOR THE NIGHT.

THE sun fell in long slanting lines as Ethel passed into the great throng of Broadway. The shadow of a tall steeple kissed her feet. She was on the east side, but men jostled her on every hand. Across the way the crowds of gayly dressed people passed before her eyes like the phantoms of a dream. She had walked weary miles. Four long hours had passed, yet she had gone on without a thought but the one with which she started, and now the night was coming, and, for the first time in many days, she knew that sleep would come with the night if she could find a place to lay her head, an easy task it seemed to her.

She forced her dulled brain to consider what had best be done. There were within a short car-ride people with whom she had supped and dined, at whose houses she had slept many a time, but the thought of renewing one of the old associations never once entered her mind. She went, by an impulse, as she had done everything that day, into a drug store just at hand and inquired of a genteel young clerk if he could tell her of a plain house where she could find lodgings for the night.

The expression of the young man's face gave this inexperienced girl some inkling of the difficulties she had yet to encounter, it was such a curious mixture of surprise and incredulity and vague bewilderment as to herself and her object in asking the question. He was evidently struck by her appearance, and, after a few minutes' meditation, he asked her to take a seat and went up to a group of gentlemen who were standing by the soda fountain, which embellished a counter at the further end of the long store.

She heard their voices conversing rapidly in whispers for a long time, as it seemed to her. At last, one, an elderly gentleman, approached her. He had a very pleasant countenance and long gray beard. Ethel looked up, and somehow, his face made her feel at home, and took away a little of the pain that lay so heavy in her breast, so heavy that she scarcely realized the weight. Here was some one who did not know her story—that in itself was relief.

He drew a chair toward him and took a seat beside her.

"My dear girl," he said, in a kind, fatherly manner, "I am an old man and shall claim an old man's privilege of talking freely. I understand you are inquiring for lodgings. Will you tell me how you come to be alone in the city with no one to protect you? If you will be frank with me, I think I can help you. I will help you."

"You are very kind, sir," Ethel answered; "but if you will direct me to a lodging-house, that is all the help I require."

The gentleman smiled.

"My poor child," he said, "what answer do you expect to receive at any ordinary place?"

"I have money with me, about fifty dollars," said Ethel, in amazement.

A look almost like incredulity stole over the gentleman's face. It seemed to Ethel as if he suspected her of playing some part. She could feel his eyes studying her face.

Presently he spoke, and his grave, pleasant tones gave her courage to look up at him once more.

"My dear young lady," he said, "I can see by your appearance that your present situation must be one to which you are unaccustomed. In most cases you would be right in not answering a stranger, but you may trust me, and the difficulties of finding a lodging-place will be very great without assistance. At any house to which you ought to go, they will simply close the door in your face."

This news was a blow to Ethel. Since she had seated herself, fatigue and drowsiness were fast overcoming her, and, if she were to find such a difficulty to-night, what would she do to-morrow and the next day, and in all the future?

She asked the question aloud.

"What am I to do, sir?"

"Have you no friends in the city?" the stranger asked, in return.

Ethel hesitated, not knowing what answer to make.

"No one now, I fear," she said, mournfully.

"Not one to whom I would be willing to go."

"Where are your parents living, my child?"

Ethel thought of her parentage, and the red blood darkened her face.

"I have no parents," she said.

"Where have you been living?"

"In New York, at—" she answered, growing more and more uncomfortable.

"Go back there, at once, no matter what may have happened."

"I can not go back," she said, simply.

"Let me take you there. Believe me it is the only right course. You have done wrong in leaving."

Ethel looked up in surprise.

"I think not," she said. "If I had it to do again, I should act just as I have done. But I can not tell a stranger about it."

"Ah! I think I understand," the old gentleman said, as if a new idea had struck him. "Perhaps you are right. And, let me advise you to go at once to your legal guardians, whoever they may be. I do not ask your confidence, but tell me if it is possible for you to reach them to-night?"

"Quite impossible," Ethel answered.

"Well, well!" the gentleman muttered, stroking his long beard meditatively; "just wait a moment."

There was another whispered conversation among the group at the further end of the store. Then he returned, jotting a few strokes with his gold pencil, upon a card.

"Here is the address of a lady, a good soul who will, I think, receive you. A nice, motherly woman, my dear. You had best be frank with her, I think."

He turned on his heel. Ethel felt by intuition, that he was disappointed in her, that, in some way, she had frustrated his benevolence, but was too bewildered and fatigued to think long on that or any other subject. She found her way to the house, the address of which was written on the card she still held in her hand, and inquired of a girl who answered her ring, if she might see Mrs. Bradford.

"Certainly, Miss," the girl answered, and showed her into a room which, what with closed shutters and the near approach of night, was so gloomy, that Ethel had much ado to grope her way to a chair.

At last, when her eyes became accustomed to the darkness, she was suddenly aware of a tall lady in black alpaca, an exceedingly unbecoming arrangement of hair, and a huge brooch close at her throat, who was bowing somewhat stiffly, as if offended at her visitor's inattention.

"Mrs. Bradford," she insinuated.

"Exactly. And what is your business, if you please?"

"I am in search of a night's lodging and will be much obliged if you can accommodate me."

"You have a note of introduction?"

"Not exactly, madam, but the gentleman whose name is on this card, gave me your address."

"Very singular," said Mrs. Bradford, "very singular! No note?"

"No, madam."

Then she forced herself to make an appeal. "I hope you can accommodate me. I really do not know where to go or what to do. I have no money—"

she added, quickly. "But I have a lady can not easily get lodging. I am told alone."

Mrs. Bradford arose with a forbidding expression of countenance.

"I am very sorry I have no unoccupied room to-night," she said, and Ethel, unoccupied room her add, under her breath thought she heard a sort of interjection. "The old fool!" as a

"I do not care for a room," Ethel suggested.

"I could sit in an arm-chair, here or anywhere, but I am so dreadfully tired, I do not know what I shall do if you will not allow me to stay."

"Very sorry, Miss —. Excuse me. I have forgotten your name. Exceedingly sorry! But it is quite impossible."

And, with an air that said all entreaty was in vain, she ushered her caller to the door.

Ethel wondered if this was a specimen of what she was destined to meet.

Going up to the door of a neighboring house, she rung the bell, which was answered almost immediately.

"May I ask if this is a boarding-house?" she inquired.

"Not for young women who come alone at this hour," was the only answer, as the door closed in her face. Again and again she tried the experiment with no better success, except that she was treated with frigid politeness at some places. Several times it seemed to her that the best thing she could do would be to sit down on some curb-stone and await her fate, but still she went on.

The idea of presenting herself at a police station, also suggested itself, but she remembered a conversation she had once heard in reference to the vagrants who found refuge at these retreats provided by law. If it were true, as she had understood, that loathsome beggars and wanderers upon the face of the earth were herded on a stone floor, without beds or seats of any kind, in a single room, she felt that she would rather spend the night under the open sky. At least she would wait until conveyed there by other will than her own. Indeed, there seemed to be little hope of shelter, for the gas-lights were already burning in the streets. The night had come.

By this time, Ethel had wandered into a far different neighborhood. All the streets she had seen in her search were quite unfamiliar, for her only thought had been to avoid all places where she might, by any possibility, meet one of her former friends. Where she walked now, the houses were less private in appearance, not fashionable nor grand in the least.

Just as she stood, hesitating in her perfect ignorance, what to do next, she was suddenly surrounded by a crowd of shabbily-dressed girls, chatting, laughing, exchanging rough jests and walking, some in groups of three and four, some arm in arm in couples, and one or two made some half audible remark about her dress or appearance.

An idea seized her. These girls boarded or made their home in some poor place where money was acceptable. She looked at them as they passed. Some of their faces were repulsive, some miserably dejected. At last she caught sight of one with a sweet, compassionate look upon it, and noticed that the companion who walked arm in arm with her was sobbing bitterly.

She stepped up to them quickly. "Will you please tell me where I can find a night's lodging?" she asked. "I am afraid I shall have to stay in the streets if you cannot, for I have been hunting for one several hours."

The sobbing girl checked her sobs and stared. So did the other. In a little while Ethel found herself surrounded by a dozen strangers, all gaping, curious, and humanely interested.

"Laws! I thought she was a lady," she heard one say.

The girls whom she had addressed looked at each other.

"Do you think Mrs. Smith would take her?" asked the one whose face had first caught her eye.

"I guess so," answered the other, and noticed as she wiped away the dropping tears, that she was young and pretty. Ethel's eyes that shone brightly, even in their grief—long dark lashes, round cheeks, and jet-black hair that strayed out into little spirals and rings under her shabby straw hat.

"Perhaps the lady we board with will take you," she coax her. She's a real nice lady."

"Only a night, did you say?" asked her companion.

"I might stay longer," responded Ethel. I scarcely know what I shall do yet, I am in so much trouble."

"What's the matter?" was the next question—a very hard one for Ethel to answer.

"It's a long story," she answered. "I could scarcely tell it just now, but if you will take me to the lady you speak of I shall be very, very thankful, and I see," she continued as they began to move on, "that I am not the only one in trouble."

"Maria's crying because she's lost her three weeks' wages," explained the other. "We all had to wait three weeks, and hers was stolen or lost."

Maria's tears broke out afresh at the recollection.

Under the convoy of half a dozen young women, Ethel arrived at a house, near by, where a stout, middle-aged woman opened the door. This person looked with some surprise at the new arrival, and then at her escorts for explanation.

"It's a young lady that was askin' for a lodgin', Mrs. Smith," said one of the girls.

"What possessed you to come here, child?" the woman demanded of Ethel.

"I have always lived at home until now," answered Ethel, "and something happened which made me leave, and now I want a place to sleep."

"The more fool for you, for running away," muttered the woman, designated as Mrs. Smith. "Well, I suppose you can stay one night. Lucky you landed here, too! Got any money?"

"Yes, madam," Ethel answered, "quite enough to pay my expenses, and I am very much obliged to you for letting me remain, I have had so much trouble hunting for a place."

With their out-of-door garments still on, the girls went crowding into a long room where a meal was spread: a beef-stew, savory enough; hominy and molasses, and weak tea. It was a great contrast to Mr. Raymond's elegant table covered with costly crystal and China, and dainty viands, this plain board and coarse delf. And the eaters, displaying their keen sense of hunger, speechlessly feeding to support life, suggested to Ethel some new ideas of the new existence into which she had so rashly ventured. Never again, thought she, to linger two hours over French dishes, foreign fruits, and rare wines. There were other things that could not be again, far harder for one to be denied than these, but the famished wanderer did not allow herself to think further.

In an incredibly short space of time, the dishes were cleared and the girls fled off to the room above, leaving Mrs. Smith and her servant girl to scrape such small morsels as were left on the dishes together and stack the crockery into piles.

"You'll have to take her in with you, Maria," said one of the girls, addressing the one who had been in tears over her loss, and Ethel followed her up the stairs into a huge dormitory where some twenty beds, with dingy coverings, stood side by side as close as they could be set to admit of being entered. All these small, iron bedsteads, with their rough coverlids, stood in a long, low room with bare windows and floor, and no other furniture save some trunks, a long line of pegs and a painted window in the dim distance at the further end, on which stood a metal lamp.

Immediately the girls commenced disrobing, hanging the shawls and hats they had placed on the pegs at the side of the room. Others yawned, and several groups squatted on the floor, or on the trunks which were ranged along the wall, and commenced talking in whispers. Ethel fancied, and not without reason, that her presence was a restraint on the occupants of the room. She looked around timidly, not liking to ask questions, and scarcely knowing what to do.

"You'll have to sleep with me," said the girl who was called Maria. "There ain't no other bed."

"No," said Ethel, "I will not crowd you that way."

"Oh, we'll be very comfortable. Come now, if you don't mind."

She led Ethel into an inner apartment where-

in was a single small bed precisely like the others.

"I'll borrow the light in a few minutes," said Ethel's new-found friend. "Sit down on the bed a little while."

They groped their way in and sat down close together.

Ethel stretched out her hand and felt for that of her companion which responded readily with a little squeeze. Then she bent her weary forehead down on the girl's shoulder.

"Maria," said she, softly. "Your name is Maria, is it not?"

"Yes, Maria Bell."

"How much money did you lose to-day?"

"Eighteen dollars."

"You will let me give you that much, won't you?" she asked.

"Let you? Why should you? Of course I'd be awful glad," stammered Maria Bell.

"And you will be very welcome to it," said Ethel. "But I thought the girls said three weeks' wages?"

"That's what we get. A dollar a day."

Maria, shortly after, procured a light, and Ethel took the money from her purse. It was a large proportion of her small fund, but she did it willingly, trusting that Providence would not let her suffer for the act.

The light was soon extinguished, and, in the darkness, the two girls lay down together. The narrow mattress was very hard, but it answered as well as down to the poor tired Ethel.

For a little while she listened to her companion's talk, then came utter oblivion, the dreamless sleep, which is death, for the time being.

CHAPTER IX.

AWAKING.

THE sunlight of a dazzling day revealed to Ethel, on her first awaking, the fly-specked ceiling, the dusty accumulation on the window panes, the rows of narrow beds with their coverings tossed across them, the defaced trunks. Then came thoughts, remembrances, the strange feeling of non-existence, of having no active part in life, of being a creature of some far away past, that was utterly blotted out, then living woe.

She lifted herself with a long sigh, to see a frowzy-headed woman, standing half-way down the room, visible through the door, with a pail of water in her hand. It was the girl she remembered to have seen removing the dishes the night before.

"Miss Smith says you'd better get up for dinner," said the girl.

"Have I slept so late?" asked Ethel.

"Yes, it's nigh twelve o'clock," was the answer.

Twelve o'clock! And she had slept since nine the night before. She arose quickly.

"Will you please tell me where I can wash?" asked the now fully-awakened sleeper, "and where I am to go?"

The girl motioned with her thumb to a door which stood ajar, so indicating the answer to the first question, then said aloud:

"By the way you came, to be sure," and went on her way.

Ethel peeped into the open room. It was a narrow one, a mere closet with a tank against the wall to receive the drippings of two hydrant faucets, and, above the tank hung two coarse jack-towels. The accommodations struck Ethel as exceedingly uncompromising, but she managed to refresh herself by bathing her face in the clear, cold water, and drying it upon her handkerchief, and, having finished dressing, opened several doors which communicated with other passages, found her exit at last, by the one she had entered the night before.

She found a plate of dinner waiting for her, and the mistress of the house stood at the end of the long table, drying dishes with a dextrous hand.

Ethel sat down immediately and commenced eating.

"Mrs. Smith," said she, after having dispatched a few morsels.

The lady went on with her work, only showing attention by the direction of her eyes.

"Will it be perfectly convenient to let me stay here a few days?"

"I hope I ain't mean," remarked Mrs. Smith, "but I should like to see a little of your money first."

Ethel took out her purse with a blush. "I suppose I ought to have spoken of it last night," she said.

"No consequence," said Mrs. Smith, somewhat brusquely, "but I do get cheated sometimes by strangers."

"What do I give you, now?" asked Ethel, and, laying down thrice the small sum men-

tioned, saying she would remain another day, at least, gave a sigh of relief.

"There's something very curious about you," the other remarked. "I can't understand how you came to come here at all."

Ethel had tried by a few moments of reflection, to fortify herself against all surprises in the form of questions.

She answered quite calmly:

"I am entirely friendless and through no fault of my own, but I can not tell you all about it. I am going to get work of some kind as soon as I can, to support myself, and I would like to stay here until I find it."

Mrs. Smith set down the pile of dishes she was lifting and stared.

"It's mighty funny," she said, "but I do believe you, every word you say. Is your father living?"

"No."

"Poor girl! When did he die?"

Ethel hesitated. The catechism was pretty severe and taught her her very first lesson in deceit, for she did not mean that any one should know her true history.

"A long time ago," she answered, presently.

"Mother dead, too?"

Ethel hesitated again.

"Yes," she said, at length, anticipating what might follow a true answer.

"That is dreadful! And you're turned away from home?"

"I came here, because I had no right there."

"You can't do work."

"I shall try teaching, I think."

"Yes. Yes. Teaching. Of course you could do that. I suppose you know an awful lot?"

"Not as much as I should like to," said Ethel.

"Perhaps you'd like to see the daily papers?"

"I should," Ethel answered, eagerly, and Mrs. Smith produced one from a closet at hand.

Ethel seized upon it and went up to the room in which she had slept, to examine its advertisement columns. There were young women, respectable girls, ladies of prepossessing appearance, of agreeable manners, of fine figures, of every religion and qualification, wanted, for various situations, governesses, teachers, domestic servants, housekeepers, sales-ladies, saleswomen, accountants.

What could she do? that was Ethel's first question. She had given no meditation to the subject before, and now she did so, she found it was no easy task to decide upon an occupation.

What could she do? It became a practical question. Read, write, cipher, sew, embroider, play upon the piano, sing passably, smatter French.

Could she teach any or all of these? Scarcely. Certainly not as learned professors teach.

A child's governess she might be. Mathematics had entered very little into her education, and they were necessary, she knew, in schools.

A domestic servant? She had not the strength. Attend a store? Perhaps, but she would first try teaching.

There were two places for governesses advertised, and Ethel concluded to answer these by mail, as was requested. For the first time she realized how much she had left behind her, when she closed the door of her childhood's home—how much of mere material convenience. She had now no stationery. It was one only of a hundred things which had been hers without a thought.

She put on her hat and shawl, and went out in search of what she wanted, taking pains to note carefully every landmark of the neighborhood, with which she was so unfamiliar, for she had no wish to lose sight of her safe harbor. She walked on until she found a fine stationer's, and there procured a small supply of paper, envelopes, pens, and ink. On her way back, she saw things in many a shop window, that seemed to her eyes imperatively necessary, but the thought of her slender resources restrained her. She bought only a tooth-brush, and a few yards of toweling, the jack-towels at Mrs. Smith's not according with her sense of nicety.

With her small parcels in her hand, she was just revolving some curious thoughts, wondering if she should ever come to using the universal jack-towels, without minding it, for she felt there was no radical difference between these girls and herself, wondering if she might not strike out some royal road to fortune, wondering a dozen other things, when a curious sound struck her ear, a laugh, a hiss, a chuckle, all in one, just above her head.

She raised her eyes with a quiet motion, and saw what made her heart stand still, two eager eyes watching her. The eyes belonged to a

negress' head, the head wore a yellow turban, and from its side dangled great, golden hoops.

In a point of time, Ethel went back to a day, it seemed weary years ago, a day when she had drowsed before the open window, and seen, as in a vision, two faces over the hedges, and this was one. She hurried on, trembling in every limb, only a few streets to pass now, but her feet could scarcely carry her.

With an infinite sense of relief, she closed the door behind her, and found her way up the stairs, to sink upon the narrow bed, and bury her face in her hands. She tried to persuade herself that she might be mistaken, that, perhaps, the connection between that vision of that spring evening, and her troubles, existed only in her fancy. In vain. Terrible, maddening suspicions forced themselves upon her.

At last she raised her head. It seemed as if it would be easy to lie still and die then of sheer distress, but she aroused herself.

"I will do the best I can while God gives me the power," she said, and unwrapping her parcels, she set paper, pens, and ink on the shabby bureau, and standing thereat, indited two notes, stating her qualifications, and offering herself as child's governess. Then, referring to the morning's paper, addressed them, one to Mrs. Thompson, the other to Mr. Sheridan, both of New York. What next? She did not mean to remain idle. There was a teacher's agency advertised. Once more she dressed herself for the street, but, before she ventured into it, she stood and shuddered, and hesitated, and, at last, taking a new direction, and looking fearfully around her, walked briskly away.

The office of the agency was in an immense building among a hundred others. It was a very strange and new experience to this girl of eighteen, to be wandering around alone, searching for employment, left wholly to her own devices. Her timidity almost overcame her, but her plans were formed, and she was determined that nothing should prevent her from carrying them out.

She found her way up the broad stairs to Room No. —, and was received by a smiling gentleman with a great deal of black eyebrow, and mustache and a mouth which seemed to say—

"I am mocking you," while the tongue said all manner of polite things.

Briefly, Ethel stated her errand. She wished to find a situation as governess, or teacher, and thought herself particularly qualified for a child's instructor.

The gentleman smiled and nodded, as though he knew of a number of such places, only waiting for a young lady like the one before him.

"Our fee is two dollars," he remarked. "Please fill this paper."

Ethel glanced over the sheet before her, and taking off her glove, raised the pen which lay beside her.

"Name?" "Residence?" These simple questions were hard ones for her to answer, but, mechanically, she had written "Ethel Raymond!" It stared her in the face, and she dared not blot it out, yet she had no right to it, she thought.

And Mrs. Smith's residence was scarcely one to which one would go for a fashionable governess, yet that she must also write.

The other spaces recording her qualifications, she filled more readily, though they seemed lamentably few when it came to setting them down in black and white, and she was more modest than many would have been in her position.

The last blank was to be filled with references.

Ethel hesitated.

"I have not yet procured any letters of introduction, or reference," she said.

The gentlemanly manager of the establishment bowed and smiled.

"It will be time enough when we find you a situation," he answered.

"Do you think you have one that will suit me—that I can fill?" Ethel asked, eagerly.

The business man glanced over the paper Ethel had inscribed with her name.

"None at present, but we will let you know."

So, obliged to be contented with that answer, the girl took her way down the toilsome steps, into the street, then to the boarding-house, immediately inditing two more notes, one to Dr. Phillips, one to an old gentleman who had been well acquainted with Mr. Raymond for years, and who had often taken her on his knee, given her candy, and petted her generally, when she was a little child. The name of this gentleman was Saunders.

To each, she represented that she was now seeking independence, and found, in procuring employment, that it was necessary to be indorsed by some respectable name.

Short, respectful, and to the point, were both these epistles, referring in no way to her former circumstances, merely stating her case, and requesting the favor of a note of reference.

For the present, there seemed nothing more to be done, except to post these notes, which Ethel concluded not to do herself, for she dreaded passing through the street again, and determined only to do so when it could not possibly be avoided. She placed the stamps on both epistles, and laid them away in the folds of her shawl, until she found an opportunity to ask some one to take them for her.

Maria Bell volunteered the office, and this off her mind Ethel resigned herself to idleness for the day. It was more trying than the hardest work could have been. As long as there was something to do, she felt that she had an object before her. Now came the time for reflection. Even if she succeeded, if she earned food, clothing and shelter by her exertions, what was to be the end of it all? Her dreams of happiness were all blighted, the old home and every tie that had seemed interwoven in her life, broken forever. Food and clothing and shelter, food and clothing and shelter—were these the aim of life? Yet these factory-girls who were around her, with whom she slept at night, were satisfied with these. Nay! Ethel reproached herself for judging them the next instant. What did she know of them, their hopes, their aspirations, their affections? As little as they knew of her.

Two days passed in idleness except that Ethel contrived to beg a little sewing from her roommate, then by the afternoon post came three letters.

There was a window with a deep window-seat in the long, bare hall outside of the dormitory, dust-begrimed, cobwebbed and deserted, and here Ethel went to read her correspondence.

The first she opened was from Dr. Phillips. She did not wait to read anything but the signature, but looked at the others. The second was signed by Anthony Saunders, and the third bore an unknown name, that of Elmira Garth.

Thus ran Dr. Phillips' note.

"DEAR MISS RAYMOND:—

"I regret exceedingly that conscience obliges me to write such lines as must now emanate from my pen, but you have invited my opinion. I could scarcely, with justice to myself, recommend a young lady who has voluntarily absented herself from her guardian's roof to the care of the young. The more especially as gratitude would have suggested her remaining to watch over and attend one who has done so much for her, and who is now in trouble and dangerously ill besides.

"Yours, etc.,

"MARCELLUS PHILLIPS."

Ethel's cheek burned. Her form quivered with emotion.

"He's sick, and yet my place is not by him," she murmured.

Anthony Saunders had written in a different strain:

"MY DEAR MISS RAYMOND:—

"Allow an old man to offer a few words of advice. I think you have done rashly in leaving your protector's roof. I am aware of the circumstances which caused your flight in some measure. I know that Mr. Raymond, my esteemed friend, can never recover the shock which has been given to his sensibilities by the duplicity of his departed wife, but he is quite willing to provide for your sustenance and support, and you, not having been to blame, should consent to be so provided for. It is, in my opinion, the proper course, and my friend, being a rich man, will be none the worse, but rather better for having done what he feels to be his duty. This much he has communicated to me during his illness."

"I would not advise you to see him, for his feelings have been greatly affected by the shock of the remarkable discovery, so suddenly made, but you will greatly relieve his mind by communicating with his lawyer."

"Do not attempt to find employment. It will be more difficult than you imagine—but take the advice of

Yours truly,

"ANTHONY SAUNDERS."

Ethel's eyes rained tears over these letters.

"Now for the other," she said, with a weary sigh. "Some appointment, I suppose, that I shall lose for want of recommendation. Employment will indeed be difficult to get, I fear."

The third letter was a complete surprise, and was inclosed in a brief note from the teachers' agency to which Ethel had applied. She read:

"MISS RAYMOND—DEAR MADAM:—

"You have been recommended to me as a suitable governess for my little daughter. If your

affliction will permit, I should be happy to receive you into my home on Monday next.

"I am a very busy woman and my daughter has been sadly neglected."

"I hope you play well, as I would prefer she should have no other teachers."

"Allow me to condole with you on the loss of your dear mamma, and believe me to be

"Sincerely yours,

"ELMIRA GARTH."

Here followed the address of a house in one of the finest neighborhoods of the city.

Ethel stared in amazement. The allusion to her "dear mamma" was unaccountable. It was a little mystery, yet one over which Ethel pondered deeply; a little mystery, yet the first link of a lengthening chain which was yet to twine around her slowly, surely crushing her within its folds, dragging her she little knew whither.

CHAPTER X.

AN APPARITION IN THE FLESH.

"MONDAY next." And there were six days to wait. Six weary days to grieve in, for life must be all grief or action now. Ethel was impatient of delay, the more especially as she could scarcely believe that the place she was gratuitously offered could be already secured to her. If it were not, she now knew what difficulties she would have to encounter. She sat with the letter still in her hand, wondering sadly if ever the great weight could be lifted from her heart, if she must sit in the shadow forever.

As suddenly as if it had sprung from the floor, a figure stood in the flood of light that streamed from the window by which she sat. The face she had seen so often in her dreams, though in life but two fleeting moments, the protruding lips and dark eyes of her race, the rich, dark skin, even the brilliant handkerchief and gold earrings just as she had twice seen them.

There was something almost grand in the woman's pose as she stood before Ethel, with one hand thrown back upon her hip, the other lifted to her head with a careless grace. Her cotton dress, with great scarlet and orange howers upon it, hung in statuesque folds, but her face was coarse and repulsive in the extreme.

Ethel held her breath, restrained the cry that arose to her lips, and, with clenched hands and trembling limbs, awaited what words would come. The mulatto woman glanced at the doors. All were closed. The stairs above and below were clear.

"And this is Ethel," she said, speaking quickly and in a whisper. "Will you come to your mother, child? Did the white folks desert ye after all? And I s'posed ye'd be free and rich. Come home, honey!"

Ethel trembled more and more. Her face grew ashen white. Horror swept her frame and through it, an indefinable thrill. She had never known a mother's love. Was it here before her in such a form? And something in the woman's tones moved her. If she could surmount the horror, there was a home and kindred for her. It was only a passing thought. A pang like death shot through her then.

This a mother! Then came the recollection that this woman, even this creature had abandoned her in her infancy. If she were, indeed, her mother, yet had she brought a cruel destiny upon her. A wild defiance arose in Ethel's breast. In all the world she would stand alone. Tears that had no cooling in them sprung to her eyes. Her soul was filled with a white heat of agony and wrath.

"You say you are my mother. Have you proof to offer?"

"Proof? Yes, honey. Lawyer Wilkins will show you. Maybe you don't believe me. Maybe this heah will satisfy you."

She took from the bosom of her dress a package of soiled papers, one of which she tossed to Ethel. Ethel nerved herself to open it and read. A letter without the usual form of address, beginning simply

"*Judith*:—I am ready at any time to certify that on the 28th of June, 18—, you brought a white child into the world, the same who was afterward named Ethel, and bought or adopted by a lady from New York, named Mrs. Raymond. I shall be willing to give my evidence whenever the trial shall occur, if the lawyer you employ will advise me at the time."

"ERASMUS CLINTON, M.D."

Here followed an address, the number of a house in a certain street of St. Augustine. The whole thing a genuine epistle from a well-known physician, the one who had attended Mrs. Raymond, during her sojourn in Florida, and had, a stranger then, subsequently settled in that state.

It was a terrible moment to Ethel, this of the first confirmation of the fact that had seemed until now almost like a dream.

"Will ye come and live with me, with your old mammy?"

Ethel gave no answer. She had no words to say, and, had she wished to speak, her tongue would have refused her utterance. She only moaned.

"I am well off, now, child. We have meat and drink. I wanted you and she tried to buy me off. I could get ye now, by law. But you'll come, won't ye, to your old mammy?"

A shudder crept through the girl's frame. Her head dropped upon her breast. This was the answer to her yearning for a mother's love, unsatisfied all her life. This was her mother, this woman who had given her shame for her birthright. Nameless, despised, tainted with the slave's blood. It seemed too terrible to believe.

A week before, she would have said she had no prejudices against the dark-skinned race. Now she felt that the fact of the African blood was the one thing that kept her from this creature, vile, unprincipled, coarse as she knew her to be. And the same blood ran in her own veins.

Walter, who talked with boyish enthusiasm of the emancipation of the African race, who boasted their equality and his own freedom from prejudice, had not cared to hear a good-by from the lips he had kissed a hundred times—because of this.

"Why did you bring this misery upon me?" she cried out. "Better to have died in my mother's arms. Better to have lived in slavery."

The woman sat down on the low window-seat close beside her, and Ethel knew that the dark eyes were reading her face, searchingly, intently.

"You had a right to live with white folks, honey. Your father was a white man, a fine man, too, I tell you. I loved him. He promised to take care of you, but he's dead. If I'd been a free woman then, I might have married him."

She ended with a gleeful laugh.

"I've a black husband now," she added, after a pause. "It don't come nateral to you to call an old colored woman mother now, does it? You wouldn't like to live among us and take care of the young 'uns. Well, well, it's a dreffle pity you're so proud-like. But I forgibs you. Jes' call me Jude, then. That's my name. Yellow Jude. And when you wants a crumb of bread, come to me. You'll know where to find me. You saw me looking out ob de window. If I moves I'll jes' let yer know. You wouldn't kiss your old mammy?"

She stood looking down a moment at the girl's bowed head that shrunk lower and lower, away from the sight of her face and the dreaded touch of her hand. Then she had gone, as silently as she came.

Ethel arose and gathered her small belongings together, put on the hat and shawl once more and found her way down stairs. The lodging-house keeper was busy in the kitchen, and there the frightened girl found her. She saw in her eyes that no unusual thing had happened. She could not bring herself to make inquiries about her visitor. The servant, too, was busy. It was plain that no one knew of the woman's entrance or exit.

"Let me settle with you now, Mrs. Smith," said Ethel. "I am going."

"Why, you don't say," answered that lady in surprise. "Then, you've got a place?"

"Yes, ma'am, I believe so."

"Where is it?"

"In New York," said Ethel, speaking again quickly, that the question might not be renewed.

"Please, say good-by to Maria for me, and the others."

"It seems to me I should like to see you again," remarked Mrs. Smith, meditatively. "I hope you'll give us a call now and then, and if you should ever be out of a place, come here, money or no money."

"Thank you," said Ethel, and good-by.

"Good-by," said Mrs. Smith.

"Good-by," said the servant, nodding and smiling.

For many minutes, Ethel walked rapidly, little caring whither her steps led. She found herself suddenly in the bustling crowd, close to a wharf, and, looking up, saw the words "To Albany."

"To Albany." Why not? Without a second thought, she stepped into the ticket-office, purchased a ticket, and sat down to wait for the boat. She wanted to pace up and down, but the consciousness that strangers' eyes were upon her, kept her quiet.

The boat bell sounded. There was a sound of hurrying feet, and the tramping of horses' hoofs, and Ethel found herself with the throng upon the Hudson River boat. Close to the railing she sat, looking down upon the dark water dashing against the vessel's hull. The spray sparkled in the summer sun. The sky was brightly blue, a few fleecy clouds hovered here and there, and Ethel forgot her terror, and misery, and anxiety, even her slighted love in the sensuous enjoyment of light and air and breezy motion.

Even the steward's voice, shouting the name of the landings, did not arouse her. Not till night was falling did she move from her position. There was one passenger upon the deck almost as motionless as she. A man, dark-browed, lithe and slender, with restless eyes and hard, immobile mouth. He shifted his position, it is true. He read a newspaper. He yawned. He left his seat even, once or twice, for the refreshment of a glass of liquor, but only for a few seconds, and his seat was not far from Ethel's, and his restless eyes moved oftenest in her direction. His look was more like curiosity than admiration, but savored of both; and there was something deeper in it, some calculation of possibilities, an indication of some previous knowledge.

Before it was quite dark, Ethel aroused herself from the state of inaction, almost of stupor, into which she had fallen, with a vague notion that something must be done. She could not float on thus forever, she knew; and so bestirred herself, found the stewardess and hired a state-room for the night.

She did not notice the bronzed face that was close behind her during her short colloquy, though she caught sight of it afterward as its owner leaned against the railing of the deck, and wondered where she had seen it before, but could not guess.

It was the same that had looked across the gate-posts on the day she left her home forever. Five days and nights Ethel remained upon the vessel, touching alternately at New York and Albany, and, although she was not aware of the fact, the stranger to whom she seemed such an object of interest, remained also, and became apparently very weary of his quarters. On the morning of the sixteenth day, Ethel landed at New York in the early dawn. She had previously taken as much pains as was possible with her hair and dress, but she looked a little anxiously in the mirror and wondered what impression her appearance might make on a stranger.

Just as she was leaving the vessel, a hand touched her. She turned quickly and encountered the eyes of the stewardess, a shrewd-looking, hard-featured woman.

"I want to speak a word to you, miss."

Ethel looked an inquiry.

"Do you know the fellow who has been following you around these five days?"

"No one has been following me around. No one that I have noticed. Are you sure that you are not mistaken?"

"No, miss. It's a dark-complexioned man, and I was pretty sure you hadn't seen him, by your look. I just wanted to tell you I think he means you some mischief, so look out. That's all. I hope you'll excuse me."

"Excuse you! You are very kind; but I think you must be mistaken. I hope so. I know of no such person. Is he anywhere in sight, now?"

"Not now, and that's the reason I spoke."

"Yes; there he is, down in the crowd, the dark-haired man with the broad Panama hat."

She pointed, eagerly. Ethel could not distinguish the direction, but her eyes lighted upon the stranger she had before noticed with an idea of having also seen him, at some previous time. While the stewardess still pointed, he moved and was lost amid the throng, and she was left in doubt as to who the stranger might be. She wondered, too, if she might trust her memory of the face, but, in the disturbed condition of her mind, it was impossible to decide.

"Do gentlemen often stay many days at a time upon these boats?" she asked.

"Yes, miss. It's quite common in warmer weather; but, this gentleman came a-purpose to watch you, you may make up your mind to that. He didn't take his eyes off you once, or go out of hearing, when he could help it. He ain't no beau of yours, is he?"

"No," said Ethel, blushing, "a perfect stranger."

With a nod she left the woman's side, and went her way down the street already filled with early passengers, milk and market-wagons, and such moving objects as one sees at that early hour.

She was going as soon as a suitable hour ar-

rived, to the house where she had some expectation of being received.

Meanwhile she remembered, with a sudden start, the state of her wardrobe, wondered what had made her oblivious to real necessities during those days of solitary voyaging. Idle, listless, emotionless, outwardly, at least, she had drifted on, taking no care for the future, and how much she ought to have done toward preparing for her new life even as her small remaining means allowed!

It was a useless task to regret her indolence; however, and there was no one injured thereby but herself. Could it be that she was never to be part of the world again? Could it be that she must wander forever alone? She, who, but a fortnight before, possessed love and every advantage of wealth. So meditating, she wandered on, stopping into a baker's restaurant for a light breakfast and lingering in thoroughfares, at the shop-windows, until three or four hours had passed by, when, at last, she sought the mansion of Elmira Garth.

CHAPTER XI.

A NEW LIFE.

IN her altered circumstances, Ethel had a singular feeling of reckless indifference. Had the change been wrought in any ordinary way, it is probable there would have been some timidity in look, or action, as she stood on Mrs. Garth's door-step. Now, bereft of every tie of relationship, of all former acquaintance, it seemed of little importance what course she pursued in any particular case, what reverses might happen, if, indeed, any calamity might now be called a reverse, yet her inbred sense of propriety and her natural good taste compelled her to act this new part with consummate skill.

She was ushered in by a tall footman and conducted into the presence of a lady, youthful, blonde, and bewitchingly beautiful, a lady who reclined on a violet velvet sofa in graceful indolence, who smiled serenely, whose whole manner and attitude indicated that her mission was to be charming and "let the world wag."

"So this is Miss Raymond," said a silvery voice.

"Sit down, dear, I'm pleased to see you. You'll take charge of my little Evy, won't you?"

"If you are quite satisfied of my ability, madam," Ethel replied, with an air of modesty, and feeling much as if she were acting a role in high comedy.

The next thing, she knew, was to produce references, but, as she had none, she remained quiet.

"My cousin L'Estrange has recommended you very highly, Miss Raymond. He heard of you, I believe, through some agency. Now I want you to teach Evy all sorts of nice things. I'm afraid you'll find her dull, and do you understand music?"

"I understand the rudiments quite well enough to teach a child. Would you like to hear me play?"

"Not necessary, in the least, dear. Some other time. You must be so fatigued! Go refresh yourself. Call for lunch if you like and make acquaintance with my daughter." Ethel bowed and arose, feeling more and more as if she were performing her part well, while Mrs. Garth touched a small bell which was close at hand and only waited for the appearance of a young woman at the door before resuming a novel which had been lying in the folds of her dress, face down.

"Miriam, show Miss Raymond to her room. See if she wants anything, and take Evy in, presently."

"By-the-by, Miss Raymond"—Ethel made another modest bow.

"There's a little matter I should have spoken about before. You know what, I suppose."

Mrs. Garth smiled, archly.

"It is usually considered very essential in such matters."

"The matter of *emolument*, I presume," said Ethel, glancing at the girl who stood waiting at the door, and hitting upon an unfamiliar word, in deference to Mrs. Garth's own hesitation. "Whatever is satisfactory to you will be so to me."

Mrs. Garth gave a sigh of relief, as having done with a troublesome piece of business, which had proved a great exertion, and became immersed in her novel immediately, while Miriam, a girl with a low forehead, bright eyes, and somewhat sharp features, conducted Ethel to a pretty little room, fitted up as a bed-chamber, with black walnut furniture, and brocaded cushions and curtains.

Ethel had just laid aside her hat and shawl, and stood before the mirror combing her long black hair, when she heard some one making ineffectual efforts to open the door, and, stepping to it quickly, found there a little creature just tall enough to reach the lock, a girl some six or seven years of age, with bright blue eyes, coal-black hair cropped close and the daintiest and shapeliest of figures, and tiny hands and feet.

"Miss Raymond, I presume," said this minutest of creatures. "I've come to make your acquaintance."

Ethel caught the child up in her arms with an impulse of delight.

"You darling little baby," she cried out, quite forgetting her role in the presence of her small visitor. She had expected a miniature Mrs. Garth, old enough for any amount of affectation, and this half-baby girl was a pleasant surprise. She sat down in a great easy-chair with the child in her lap and, somehow, felt her eyes grow moist.

"I'm Evelina Garth, Miss Evelina Garth, and you are going to have entire charge of me."

Miss Evelina Garth scrutinized Ethel with a critical eye, turning her wise little head first one way and then the other.

"I like you, Miss Raymond," she said, after a few moments. "Very much!"

"Thank you, dear," said Ethel, laughing. "And I like you."

She kissed the child's forehead tenderly.

"Will you paint me pictures and dollies, Miss Raymond?" said Ethel's pupil, smiling up into her face, and caressing her with one tiny hand.

"Yes, dear, and teach you to read and write. You'll like that, will you not?"

"I don't know."

"Do you like fairy-tales?"

"Very much!"

"Would you not like to read them yourself?"

"I'd rather hear you read them."

Ethel smiled.

"But when I leave you, when you get older, you will have no one to read for you. And you will want to write letters."

"Yes. I would like to write letters to gentlemen like mamma does. Mamma has beautiful note-paper, with monograms, and she writes to a great many gentlemen, and goes to concerts and operas with them; but papa is not jealous. He says he wants her to enjoy herself. Now, I wonder if he'll let me enjoy myself when I get to be a lady?" The child crossed her slippered feet and looked down meditatively. Presently her face lighted up.

"Can you make paper-dolls, Miss Raymond? Cousin L'Estrange, mamma's cousin, Mr. Oscar L'Estrange, says you can."

"Did he? Yes, I can make them; I used to make them when I was a child myself."

"I'm so glad," said the child, with a little sigh of satisfaction. "Cousin L'Estrange said you could. He told us your mamma was a sweet lady, and you were so sorry when she died."

"Does your mamma's cousin come here much?" asked Ethel.

"Every day. Now let us have lunch. Do order currant-jelly, and sponge-cake. We'll have it in the nursery. Come!"

Ethel, first stopping to arrange her hair hastily, consented to be led, and found herself in a long room, with windows on two sides, and furnished with heterogeneous furniture. In one corner a great pile of books heaped on the floor. Against the wall, a book-case, which had been converted into a large doll's house. Arm-chairs, one or two wooden benches, a desk, a step-ladder, and toys of every description, scattered here and there.

"This is the nursery," said Ethel's companion. "My own room. And that's the bell you ring when you want anything. I like to have a governess, and I guess I will learn to read."

Her half-hour's sojourn had taught Ethel that there was no director in the household, that she was quite at liberty to do as she chose, and the best step was to take the affairs with which she was immediately concerned into her own hands. She rung the bell, and told the servant who answered the summons to bring lunch for Miss Evelina and herself, mentioning the articles already bespoken by her small pupil, and found that she had done exactly what was expected of her.

A dainty luncheon soon appeared, and was placed upon one of the several tables which were scattered irregularly about the room, and, sitting in the recess, by the window, which overlooked the garden at the back of the house, with Evelina Garth perched in a high chair di-

rectly opposite her, and eying her intently with her great, inquisitive blue eyes, Ethel partook of the various viands before her, with genuine relish.

That over, the tray was removed, and she sat about forming her plans for the future.

By evening, she and the child had arranged the scattered books in their proper places, and a few were selected and laid aside with other articles preparatory to a course of instruction.

They had been sitting together, the child in Ethel's lap, for some minutes, when Evelina looked up, suddenly.

"It is time to dress for dinner," she said.

"We dine at five. Miriam dresses me. I can have on my white muslin, and blue kid shoes. What will you wear?"

"What, indeed?" cried Ethel, for the first time remembering the state of her wardrobe.

"Run to Miriam then, Evy."

The child departed, and Ethel, scarcely knowing what to do in her predicament, went to her room to decide. The black silk was well enough, quite the thing, perhaps, for the masquerade she was performing. She examined her exchequer, which had dwindled greatly. There was still a small sum remaining, and Ethel set forth to purchase a few linen collars. She lighted upon a cambric morning-wrapper, and one or two other ready-made garments, which suited her wants, feeling for the first time, a natural, feminine longing for the dainty clothing, which, still, doubtless, hung in her wardrobe at home, which was home for her never more henceforth.

She knew she might have had them for the simple asking, but the thought of claiming them never once entered her mind. With the fresh collar and cuffs, her plain black silk, well brushed, and her hair neatly braided close around her shapely head, Ethel felt she could not have done better if she had had her wardrobe to choose from.

Ethel stood brushing her hair before the glass, looking with absolute pain at the kinky ripples that would spring up under the brush, when there came a tap at her door, and a small voice cried:

"May I come in?"

"Yes, Evy."

The child ran in, in a cloud of fairy-like muslin, adorned with blue ribbons and shoes.

It was evident, however, that she was not thinking of her dress now. She held something in her hand, which she seemed half afraid to produce, yet her face was wreathed in smiles.

"Mamma sends you her compliments, and wishes you—" she began, and then broke down.

"I don't know what mamma said, but she sent you something, because I wanted her to."

Evelina here thrust an envelope into Ethel's hand.

Ethel's cheek burned.

"And why did you ask her?" she said.

"Because you looked sorry when I asked you what you would wear."

Ethel pocketed the envelope, which contained a fifty-dollar note, and pocketed her confusion as well, feeling somewhat relieved in spite of her mortification as she stooped to kiss the little messenger.

"It was very kind of your mamma," she whispered, then took the child's hand and went down the stairs into the room where she had first met Mrs. Garth.

That lady was refitted with pale-blue silk, her golden coiffure rearranged in the latest fashion, her complexion somewhat more brilliant than it had been in the morning.

She was engaged in conversation with a gentleman, and the gentleman arose as Ethel entered, and bowed.

"Miss Raymond, Mr. L'Estrange," said Mrs. Garth, in her silvery tones, and Ethel, amazed and bewildered, saw the man who had attracted her attention on the Albany boat, the man whom the stewardess might or might not have pointed out, the man who had recommended her so highly to her patroness. There was no recognition in his eyes.

"Miss Evelina is highly delighted with the honor of having a governess all to herself," he said, with a curious, little, clipping accent, as if the language were new to him. "I think she has reason."

He resumed his seat on the violet sofa, and Ethel retired to a window with her charge, until they were summoned to dinner. At table she was presented to Mr. Garth. She saw at a glance that it was from him Evelina inherited her looks.

Mr. Garth was a silent, meditative man, with shrewd gray eyes, large and powerful as to figure, and, evidently, at that time, much preoccupied with some affairs of his own.

His smile and manner were charming when he did arouse himself for a few moments.

"Shall you be at home to-night, William?" asked Mrs. Garth.

"I believe not," replied her husband. "Business to attend to. Who'll be here?"

"A few friends who happen to be in town, I dare say. I haven't invited any one, but somehow, they seem to find their way here!"

"And no wonder," said Mr. Garth. "Whereat his wife blushed, and laughed."

"Well, well," he said: "I hope you'll have a pleasant time."

"I hope so. And Miss Raymond will play for us. Will you not?"

"Certainly, if you wish it," said Ethel.

When evening came, Ethel was summoned to the drawing-room, there to find Mrs. Garth the center of a group of admirers, men of various ages and appearance. Evelina was much noticed, fed on bon-bons, and as for Ethel, she sat apart, played on Mrs. Garth's piano when desired so to do, sung one song on invitation, and was discreetly silent, and much amused by the scene.

She seemed to have the power in these new acquaintances of putting herself away, as it were.

Alone at night, all her anguish came back, all the shame, and terror, and desolation, and sorrow, but she felt that the child's companionship was one drop of true comfort in her bitter cup, and thanked God that even this one consolation was hers.

CHAPTER XII.

A SURPRISE.

DURING one of Mrs. Garth's numerous evening entertainments, Ethel, thinking she would not be missed, had wandered for a short time, into the conservatory, and stood, looking down into the heart of a great passion-flower, that glowed like a flame, reflecting the brilliant gas-light, when a voice aroused her.

"Mrs. Garth sent me to ask you to favor the company with a song."

She raised her eyes quickly, to find Oscar L'Estrange standing beside her. He did not leave her, and turn back at once, nor did he offer to escort her, but remained quite motionless, and presently spoke again.

"A very beautiful flower!" he said.

"Very," replied Ethel, but she had not been thinking of the flower, but of her own conservatory at home, and how often Walter and she had stolen there to stand among the blossoms, clasping hands and whispering tender words.

"You will sing for us, Miss Raymond?"

"Certainly, if Mrs. Garth desires it," was Ethel's answer.

"Miss Raymond, you have a beautiful voice. It thrills me!"

He spoke with an intonation that made the speech sound genuine. Ethel raised her eyes and they met his, burning with warmth and passion. Coldly she looked into them. They did not stir her save to wonder. Quietly she said:

"You are fond of music."

"Music from your lips. Yes."

The governess turned to the door.

"Stop!" cried Oscar L'Estrange. "I must tell you now. I love you! I am not like other men. I do not wait to see if you can return my love before I speak. I will wait for your answer."

He snatched her hand and kissed it fervently. She pulled it from his grasp.

"Hush! Do not talk in this way. Let me go!" she cried wildly, excited at last, for, although this man was so unlike her lost lover, something in his looks and words recalled the past too painfully. She hurried away, sat for a moment at the piano, every pulse beating wildly, then summoned all the strength of her will to quiet her emotions and sung the first melody she could recall.

It happened to be the song from the "Bohemian Girl."

"When other lips and other hearts."

She sung it sweetly, forgetting everything else for the time being, but the graceful flow of the music. At its close, she looked up, to see the restless blue eyes of Oscar L'Estrange, restless no more. Fixed, intent, burning.

How had it happened? He had scarcely seemed to notice how evenings had passed when he had not spoken a word to her. She knew as any woman knows when love is genuine, that his was so. One glance had revealed it genuine in the sense of intensity and depth. The knowledge flattered and grieved her.

She avoided him from that day, whenever it was possible, keeping Evelina with her on every

occasion, but in vain. He pursued her with flattering speeches, with ardent words and looks—at last, with gifts which Ethel utterly refused. As for Mrs. Garth, she knew nothing of all this. Wrapped in her own vanity, thinking only of gayety and the admiration of gentlemen friends, she had neither eyes nor ears for others and would have said, had she been asked, that her cousin L'Estrange was as much in love with her as the rest.

Ethel was pleased that this should be so. She trusted in her own discretion and management to convince Oscar L'Estrange, at last, that his suit was useless.

Meanwhile, she was safe from bodily suffering, well treated, and as happy as she ever hoped to be again, in the companionship of little Evelina.

So the weeks rolled by, until the summer was fading and there was no change, but the change was soon to come. One morning a letter arrived, inviting Miss Evelina Garth to visit some friends who lived at a distance.

Mrs. Garth consented readily.

"It is extremely convenient, as it happens," said she, "for we are going on our grand excursion this week and I want your company, so we'll just send Evy off."

The grand excursion turned out to be a trip to an obscure locality in New Jersey, the beauties of which had but recently been discovered, and made capital of, by an enterprising hotel-keeper.

Mr. Garth, immersed in business, remained in the city, while Mrs. Garth, accompanied by Ethel and escorted by her cousin L'Estrange, betook herself to meet a gay party of friends at the Mountain House.

That lady's last conquest was a young military officer, who was excessively smitten, but had not yet reached the point of a mad declaration, from which Mrs. Garth's admirers usually subsided, owing to her judicious management, into life-long friends, ready to do escort duty on all occasions, to heap presents upon her, to pour confidences into her ears—usually, though not always.

The party was a lively one, the gentlemen preponderating. There were boating, fishing, dancing, flirtation, and Ethel found herself unconsciously drifting with the rest, found that her conversation was interesting to others as in the days when she was Mr. Raymond's daughter. It was but a hollow satisfaction, yet it served to save her from brooding over her sorrows while she was surrounded by company.

The Mountain House overlooked a beautiful lake. Dark, tangled woods intervened, and the scenery was exceeding lovely. This glimpse of Nature in her sunny, summer mood, did much to raise Ethel's spirits, which youth and health, alone, had prevented from being entirely crushed.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PROPOSAL.

ONE day there was to be a picnic at "the lake." Wagons were filled with provisions, music was provided and carriages conveyed the party to the beautiful spot. It was a long ride through the woods, but a pleasant one. There were singing and laughter and witty repartees. The day was bright and everything went well. As usual, Mrs. Garth was accompanied by cousin L'Estrange and Ethel. The youthful military officer before mentioned submitted with a very ill-grace to the blandishments of a young lady, by no means destitute of charms, except to his distracted fancy, and Mrs. Garth looked her loveliest.

The day passed as such occasions usually pass, with the usual admixture of abortive enjoyment and unexpected pleasure. There was much laughing and joking, some sentimental passages between parties who were willing to "make believe" for the day, some genuine love-making. As for Ethel, she took refuge with a gentleman who, being neither talented, youthful nor wealthy, was ignored by most of the party. She found him, however, a companionable person, a lover of natural objects, and intimate with all the little grasses, ferns, wild flowers and mosses they came across. It was long after luncheon, the party were mostly walking in little groups or resting under the trees, the music and dancing had ceased and there were occasional remarks as to the lateness of the afternoon.

Ethel's companion was busy pointing out to her with the aid of a magnifying-glass, some minute differences in the fronds of two species of ferns, when she saw Oscar L'Estrange approaching.

"Mr. King," he commenced saying, before he had fairly reached them, "as you are a bachelor, and not upon escort duty, some of the ladies have deputed you to give orders for the carriages. How do you like the task?"

Mr. King laughed, looked longingly at Ethel and the little clump of ferns, pocketed his magnifying-glass and tore himself away.

Oscar L'Estrange's light tone changed.

"Why have you avoided me all day, Miss Raymond?" he asked, almost fiercely, drawing closer.

"I had no wish to be rude. Excuse me if I have seemed so, Mr. L'Estrange."

He was about to reply when a gentleman walked up and addressed them, to Ethel's infinite relief. She contrived that he should not leave them although he had only stopped for a passing word, for she thought if she could keep some one with them until the carriages arrived L'Estrange's opportunity would be lost, at least for the present.

There was now a general call to the starting-place, where Ethel found to her great consternation that some new fancy was astir in Mrs. Garth's mind in relation to the home-going, for she offered her own vehicle with great earnestness to a gentleman and his two daughters who had come in separate conveyances, and from different quarters, and wished to return together, their home being distant and in quite an opposite direction from any of the rest of the party.

"And what will you do, then, Mrs. Garth?" cried one of the daughters.

"Oh, some one will take compassion upon me, I dare say," remarked that lady.

The military gentleman, glowing with delight, immediately offered his services.

Ethel's one hope was now in the large wagon which stood waiting and empty, but the hope was disappointed, and to her and Mr. L'Estrange remained an old-fashioned gig. There was nothing to be done but to accept the situation with the best grace possible.

The carriages drove off, one by one, their occupants perhaps a shade less lively than in the morning. Ethel almost trembled as L'Estrange lifted her into his conveyance with a look of supreme satisfaction in his eyes. Then his whip cracked and the horse sped for a few moments at a quick rate through the woods, but, gradually, he allowed its speed to slacken. He was evidently repressing his strong emotions. He spoke of the pleasures of the day, of the charming prospect, of many things; and then the reins dropped and the horse walked leisurely along the wood-path.

"Are you not afraid we shall be late?" asked Ethel.

"He burst out almost fiercely:

"It is always so. You fear to let me breathe in your presence. You treat me like—"

Then he broke off, and his voice lowered to rich music.

"Miss Raymond, Ethel I will call you when I am all alone. Ethel, I love you. I admire you. I could kneel to you. You are to me a queen, a goddess. There is no way I can tell you what you are to me. Will you give me heart for heart?"

He had taken her hand. He pressed it passionately to his breast. There was pleading in his eyes, in his attitude, in the touch of his fingers.

"Mr. L'Estrange, I am so sorry!" Ethel faltered.

"Sorry! Then you will not love me. You cast me from you! Am I a dog? Say you do not mean it. Say you will some time yield. I will wait."

"But you must not wait. Indeed, indeed I did not know this. I am very grateful, but it is impossible that we should ever marry."

"Impossible! Miss Raymond, will you tell me why?"

"For many reasons," answered Ethel. "If I felt as you wish me to feel, I would tell you all. As it is, I will only say that I cannot give you the return your affection deserves."

His head fell for a few moments. Then he raised it and spoke more calmly than before:

"Listen! You are alone in this world—you who should grace a palace. There is nothing for you but this. You will some day marry. There is all the world to choose from, but are you sure that all, even one, will be better than I, more worth the choosing?"

"I am rich. I have a handsome estate in Florida. You will be surrounded by admirers. Every luxury shall be laid at your feet. I will adore you all my life. Do not be hasty. Do not reject me. Why should I be despised?"

"Mr. L'Estrange," Ethel said. "it is not a

question of weight and measure. I, too, have loved. I am already engaged in marriage and have never drawn back from my engagement. I will tell you. It may be some sort of compensation to you to know that my hand has been rejected, that I suffer daily for the past. We have all our sorrows."

"Let me heal yours! It shall be the greatest pleasure of my life, my darling! The coward, the miscreant that drew back, let me take his place. Whatever his motive, it is nothing to me."

"You are—Ethel Raymond. Is not that enough? I ask no more. There is no disgrace can cling to you. If you were the child of a slave I should love you the same!"

Ethel panted with a sudden terror at the words. Had this strange man some mysterious knowledge of her history?

He added, quickly:

"Birth, fortune, fame, they are nothing to me. Let me take his place."

"You cannot do it."

The words came from Ethel's heart, and the man beside her felt it. His eyes blazed. They were passing a steep bank at the moment. He glanced toward it as if some fierce impulse filled him, then checked the rising fire and whispered, almost abjectly:

"Ethel! love me for myself!"

"Do not be distressed, Mr. L'Estrange. Let us be friends for awhile."

"And you will some day marry me?"

"Never!"

He whipped the horse up savagely. They had been far behind the rest, but they reached the hotel first of all. He gave her his hand as he alighted and whispered just these words:

"I could have been the best of friends or the worst of enemies. Remember! it is *you* who have chosen."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BOOK OF BIRDS.

It is *you* who have chosen!"

The words rung in Ethel's ears. They haunted her. And those words: "The child of a slave." It seemed to her they must have some hidden meaning. Who was this mysterious man who had first appeared on the day of Mrs. Raymond's funeral, who had certainly contrived that she should enter Mr. Garth's house, who had fallen so hotly in love with her, who now seemed to hate her with equal heat?

She regarded him with an almost superstitious fear.

On their first day at home little Evelina came dancing up to Ethel.

"Miss Raymond," said she, "will you please let me look at 'The Book of Birds'? It's in French with colored plates and as big as that," measuring with her little arms outstretched.

"After lessons, of course," she added.

"We'll make it a part of our lessons," said Ethel, "but where shall I find the wonderful book?"

"In the library."

"Come and show me, dear," said Ethel.

"I don't know where it is. I never saw it."

"Then who told you of it?" asked the new-fledged governess.

"I mustn't tell. That's a secret," said the child. "But please get it for me. It's so very beautiful. There's a peacock with real gilt on its wings!"

So Ethel, very much amused, went on her search.

It happened that Mr. Garth sat in the library with a pencil and paper working out some, apparently, knotty problem. He looked up with an involuntary frown as Ethel entered, and she drew back in confusion.

"I am afraid I shall interrupt you," said she. "I had come for a book for Miss Evelina."

"Come in, Miss Raymond, by all means. You won't interrupt me in the least," Mr. Garth said, bowing politely.

The library was a very desultory one. Almost without arrangement, except on some of the shelves where books relating to mercantile and commercial matters were placed. Ethel's only guide was that the book was large. She searched indefatigably without success. Presently she heard Mr. Garth leave the room, yawning as he went, and looked around at the clock to find that she had spent a useless hour in the library, and, taking one or two books on ornithology, dry enough, but illustrated with common cuts which she thought might please her pupil, she sought the child to find her for the first time in her experience in a very bad humor.

It happened, in the course of the next few days, that Ethel met Mr. Garth several times

either in the library or parlor and quite alone. She regarded these meetings as pure accident, and they were evidently not intentional on her part or his. To her surprise she was summoned into Mrs. Garth's presence one morning and found that lady with a most contemptuous look on her small, pretty features! Evelina stood behind her with her tiny fists clenched, scowling under her black brows at her late favorite.

Mrs. Garth was evidently preparing for speech, a withering one to judge by her expression, but the child broke out first.

"It's very mean of you, Miss Raymond, to flirt with my pa! Such doings! Cousin L'Estrange told us."

Ethel stared. She was dumb with surprise. However, she seated herself in a quiet manner, and awaited the coming speech.

"Miss Raymond," said Mrs. Garth, languidly, "our engagement, I believe, was not a formal one. There was no time assigned."

"Entirely informal, Mrs. Garth," said Ethel.

"You will please name your price for what you consider a term and find quarters elsewhere."

Finding quarters elsewhere had a very hollow sound to Ethel, but she merely bowed her head.

She felt a choking sensation in her throat as she looked at the little creature who had been so fond of her, now in arms against her. But for pride, she could have shed tears. As soon as she could command herself to perfect calmness, she spoke out:

"I shall certainly name no price," she said.

"For aught I know, I have been well paid already, and I will leave you this hour if you wish, Mrs. Garth, but is it not possible that some explanation—"

"Explanations are unnecessary," interrupted that lady. "Sit here by mamma, Evy."

From that moment Ethel's lips were sealed. There was only herself to suffer from her own acts, and she felt no obligation to submit to further insults.

"Come, Fate!" she cried, as she bent over her baggage. "Let us see what will happen next!"

That Evy should have turned against her so readily was a real cause of grief which she could not disguise from herself, but others far dearer had discarded her for no fault of her own, and this child, at least, believed herself just.

When she was quite ready to leave, Ethel presented herself to Mrs. Garth with her speech carefully prepared.

"Mrs. Garth," she said, "I have been with you but a short time, but I think you have found me faithful and conscientious and you will certainly admit that I have behaved with great propriety toward every member of your family, including my little pupil. I do not ask why you have tired of my service, but I ask you, in justice to yourself and me, to give me a written letter of recommendation. I tell you frankly it is quite necessary to me and there is no question that I have a right to it."

Mrs. Garth shrugged her graceful shoulders.

"I have my own opinion about that, but wait a few minutes," said she.

"Evy, tell Miriam to fetch my writing-desk." The maid brought Mrs. Garth's desk, looking insolently at Ethel while she stood waiting, and Mrs. Garth wrote a few lines, and folded the sheet on which she had written in an envelope.

"Miriam, you may go," she said, handing the girl the *papier-mache* toy. "And, Evy, hand this to the governess. Now for my book."

With a well-affected yawn she took a novel from the folds of her dress, and in another instant was deeply immersed in its pages.

Ethel pocketed the note and looked into the sweet little face she had loved so well, her lips involuntarily shaping a wistful kiss, but the child answered with a pout and ran back to her seat on the sofa beside her mother.

Once more in the streets, Ethel pondered what she should do. There seemed to be but one place to go to. That was Mrs. Smith's boarding-house. There the mysterious man whom she did not doubt had been the cause of her dismissal would not be likely to trace her, if he wished to do so. There was another she dreaded far more to meet, but she hoped that, for a few days, she could keep within doors and escape observation.

It was still early, and, with a sort of joy in her freedom, though she was unhappy and distressed enough, Ethel walked into the great thoroughfare of the city, and, feeling hungry, entered a small restaurant and called for a meal. While she waited, she took Mrs. Garth's note from her pocket. Much to her astonishment, a fifty-dollar check fell from it, causing half the people at the small tables near to

watch her open-mouthed for the next few minutes.

Feeling herself to be the center on which so many eyes were fixed, Ethel was somewhat embarrassed, but she quietly perused the paper.

"Miss Raymond," it began: "I enclose what I consider your dues. Mr. Garth would not allow me to do otherwise, but I decline to endorse a person such as you have proved yourself. Explanations are, of course, unnecessary."

"Yours, etc.,"

"ELMIRA GARTH."

Ethel fired with indignation, but she managed to keep her countenance under control, and, by the time her refreshments had arrived, was able to eat them with enjoyment.

"Mistress Fate has trouble in store for me, I see," she said to herself, with a curious smile.

The check must be cashed. Ethel was very glad to find it indorsed in Mr. Garth's own hand, as it was his custom to do with all the checks which his wife held, for the bank was one she knew nothing of. It happened to be but a short distance from the restaurant, and she started in that direction when she had settled her account.

Only two steps had she taken. Her feet were on the pavement and a hand came down upon her shoulder, a man's hand. She trembled from head to foot. Her first impulse was to fly, anywhere, only not to know what was coming, and then she turned to look.

CHAPTER XV.

THE OLD LOVE.

In the glaring daylight, among the busy crowd, with their altered lives and the great gulf fixed between them, with their mutual memories, with that undying love that neither time, nor change, nor wrong, nor cruelty, nor prejudice can ever uproot from any human heart, unless the heart itself be torn to death, Walter Merritt and Ethel stood face to face.

He gave her his hand as he would have done in the past time, and she looked into his eyes and read love there as she had often read it, long before.

"For Heaven's sake, Ethel, do not deny me, do not speak now, but come with me at once where we can talk together. I have so much to say." These were his first words.

She drew away her hand and stepped back.

"I think it is better not," she said, hesitatingly. "We parted once, and there can be nothing more between us."

"I deserve all that," he answered, "but do not refuse to hear me."

She could not refuse. The love in his eyes pleaded for him. There was a theater not far away, where the doors were opened for a matinee, and thither they went together, and were soon ensconced in a private-box.

What the play was neither of them ever knew, then or afterward. They had eyes or ears for nothing but each other. They only retained enough of outward consciousness to remember that they might be observed by others.

"Ethel," whispered Walter Merritt, the moment they were seated, for they had spoken no word to each other as they hurried through the bustle of Broadway, "dear Ethel, can you ever forgive me, really, utterly, that I did not know myself at first? I can never forgive myself. I can never be happy without you. Will you let me know where you are and what you are doing?"

"Will it not be better to part just as we have met?" Ethel asked.

"Will you tell me why it would be better?" said her lover.

"Because the past is past, Walter, because our lives must be apart, and because we can never forget."

"Ethel," said Walter, "I am in a great difficulty, which makes it very hard for me to explain myself, but I will be frank and you will forgive me I know if I hurt you unintentionally."

"You talk as if our engagement was broken, but you have just said that neither of us could forget. I do not wish to. If I had means to live, ready at my hand, I would ask you to come and share my life at once. If I knew how it was with you, I could tell better what to do. I know that you left Mr. Raymond's house, and that is all."

"If you are poor, share my poverty, Ethel. That will give me strength. I would never let you suffer. If you are safe, remain where you are until I have won my way—"

"Poor? Walter, what do you mean?"

"I left my father's home some time ago."

"For my sake?"

"For your sake, Ethel."

"Oh, I am so very, very sorry," Ethel said, with the tears in her eyes.

"I shall be able to get along, Ethel."

"Not for that. Not for that," said Ethel. "But your home was so dear to you. Your mother, your sisters."

"They were all on one side, and love and justice on the other."

Ethel's cheek burned. She understood too well what justice meant. *The child of a slave!* Ah, it was a very, very bitter thought.

"Go back, Walter," she said. "Go to your home, I entreat you. You do not know what the world is, yet. And as for me—believe me, for I mean it, every word—I would never marry you. All thought of that is utterly over."

"Because you hate me?"

She was silent for a moment. Then she said:

"No, Walter, I will speak the truth. Because I love you. Because I will not link my life with yours. Because of the blood in my veins. There. Don't look sorry for me. I have thought of it a thousand times. It is an old story. I have had dreams of your coming back to me, but never once have I thought of yielding to your wishes. I am set apart, Walter, by my cruel fate. I am sure you will turn back from the step you have taken."

"Never. Even if I must believe you, but I will never leave you until you yield. Give me your promise, Ethel, again."

"It is useless to ask me. I will not."

He looked at her despairingly and sighed.

"God knows, it is ridiculous for me to ask a promise of you when I do not yet know how I shall live myself, but it would give me such strength."

"Ethel, are you working?"

"Yes—no—not at present. I left a very pleasant place to-day but hope soon to get another."

"A governess?"

"Yes."

"Poor Ethel!"

"What are you going to do?"

"Oh, there are a hundred things."

"Yes?" said Ethel, doubtfully.

"Surely an able-bodied young man with a decent education need not starve in New York?"

"I suppose not. Some of your father's friends will help you to a situation."

"No, Ethel. I will not publish our disagreement. My home is sacred to me although I have left it. Surely, friends are not needed. Where are you going next?"

Ethel hesitated a moment, then gave him her address. This episode in her life was so sweet she could not forbear to prolong it, though it must be but a few days. Forever after, life would be bearable, she thought, knowing that Walter loved her despite her birth, despite the shame which was no fault of hers.

"You will let me see you sometimes, Ethel?" Walter asked.

"We will meet once again, if you like. Perhaps more, but you must believe what I have said. Do not think that I shall be so weak and wicked as to consent to be your wife. That is over, forever."

Walter was silent, contented with her promise, for a time. They talked a little of other things, of the past and of the future, and then Ethel remembered her check. There was barely time to draw it that day, and she explained her wishes to Walter. Of her difficulties she said nothing, of her past troubles or those she still anticipated.

They went together to the bank, and Walter watched her as she signed her name. Her cheek burned. It was very dreadful to see it there, "Ethel Raymond," just as in the old days, and know that she had no right to it.

There was some question about Mr. Garth's signature, but, after a careful examination, the cashier evidently concluded that it was genuine, for he gave a sort of "photographic" glance at Ethel and handed her a roll of small notes, at the same time carelessly asking her address.

She looked at Walter piteously and then stammered out the number and street of Mrs. Smith's lodgings, and the young man jotted down a few pencil marks upon a card-board calendar which hung against the wall.

Again in the street, the lovers bade each other farewell, and Ethel went alone to the lodging-house she had never intended to enter again. The girls were not yet at home. Mrs. Smith appeared well pleased to see her and talk with her while the preparations for supper were going on.

When the evening came and the girls, going up to the long dormitory, found Ethel there, there was a flutter of pleasure. Maria Bell put

both arms around her neck and kissed her with tears of absolute delight, and Ethel was very grateful for the affection she showed, though she could scarcely understand it upon so short an acquaintance. The fact was that her act of kindness in replacing the lost money had made a great impression on the girl's mind, for she measured Ethel's generosity by her own poverty, while Ethel, unused to poverty and new to its lessons, had considered her gift but a trifle.

In the midst of their talk Ethel was summoned to the empty room, there to meet Walter Merritt. He begged her to walk and talk with him in the open air, and she gladly consented. She was not afraid to leave the house under cover of the darkness. His words of love were very sweet. It was very sweet to know that she had not changed in his regard except to grow dearer, it was very sweet to know that he was quite willing to give up all the world for her, and, as long as he asked no answer from her, Ethel drank his words eagerly, thirstily, a sweet draft, but not dangerous to her, she felt. She had been without comfort so long, she could not push the cup from her at once.

So an hour passed, two, and they hastened to the lodgings. Stopping at the door, Walter begged that he might come again, and Ethel had barely answered "Yes," when the door was opened and a man stepped out, a man elegantly dressed and smoking a cigar. He stepped back with a start, and the light from a street-lamp fell upon the features of Oscar L'Estrange.

He flung his cigar into the street, doffed his hat, and bowed profoundly.

"I called with the purpose of meeting Miss Raymond," he said, respectfully.

Ethel, taken aback by this sudden appearance, scarcely knew what answer to make. The feeling that Walter Merritt was her proper protector was strong upon her, and, trusting to explanations in the future, she said:

"Mr. L'Estrange you may speak with perfect freedom before this gentleman, if your message is important. Perhaps it is from Mrs. Garth."

"I am not come from any one," he said, speaking quickly. "I will see you again at a more convenient time."

"There can scarcely be a more convenient time, Mr. L'Estrange," said Ethel. "I am so situated that I shall not be able to receive callers, and may change my residence at any moment."

"I will speak before this gentleman," said Oscar L'Estrange, impetuously, with a scowl at Walter.

"I offer you honorable marriage here. I make this offer, this supplication, what you choose to call it, in the street, on the door-step, now, for the last time—not for the last time if you will hear me again—for the second time. I am a gentleman, you know. I have lands and fortune. I can make you rich and honored. Do not answer hastily."

"I am sorry you have said this here," said Ethel; "but I will answer you—"

"Not now, I pray," said Oscar L'Estrange, very earnestly. "Think of it. Answer me after consideration. I will leave you now."

"Stop!" cried Ethel, but he was gone.

Ethel rung the bell hastily.

"Let us say good-night quickly, Walter," she said, "for it is very late," and in a moment's time he had snatched a kiss from her lips.

Maria Bell and the others were all sleeping quietly and Ethel lay long awake pondering over the events of the day. Happy, puzzled, troubled, she sunk at last into dreams amid a chaos of excited feelings. It was broad daylight when Ethel awoke and heard a voice repeating something at first unintelligible which resolved itself into these words:

"There's a nigger wants to see you now."

It was Mrs. Smith's voice and she was evidently grumbling. Something must have happened to displease her, Ethel thought, but she was too much troubled by the dread of the coming interview to give much attention to anything else.

"May she come up here?" she asked hastily, putting on her dress.

"Everybody to his taste," said Mrs. Smith, taking her way down stairs, and presently Ethel heard the dreaded step.

Yellow Jude entered and seated herself upon one of the beds in the outer room where Ethel had gone to meet her.

"My gal's mighty fine-looking gal!" said the woman, eyeing Ethel, who shivered from head to foot under her glance.

"Got a word for poor old Jude, this mornin'?" said she.

Ethel only sat and stared, a cold horror creeping over her.

"Jude's mighty poor this morning. Ain't you got somethin' for her?" asked the mulatto woman.

All the color had forsaken Ethel's face. With trembling fingers she searched for her pocket-book and producing the first note she touched, thrust it into the yellow, outstretched hands and then covered her face. In a moment she heard retiring footsteps, the shuffling sound of loose-heeled slippers, and found herself alone.

"I must never see Walter again," she said.

"Oh, this is so terrible, so terrible! Do I owe that creature a daughter's duty?"

A few struggling sobs and she grew calm again. Resolution was gathering in her breast.

Still, oh, so still! she sat, then she rose up with her teeth set, her mouth fixed and grim.

Her trunk, which had been sent the night before, stood in the little room where she and Maria Bell had slept together. The card with "E. Raymond" printed upon it was still tacked to the outside. She tore it into tiniest fragments, which she laid on the bureau. Then she searched her pocket-book and the pockets of her dresses, destroying every paper she found, in a like manner. She wrote on a blank card the name, Ellen Wade, and placed it in her pocket-book.

That done she went down into the kitchen and told Mrs. Smith that she was going away, stooped and thrust the fragments of paper into the stove grate, watching them as the fire consumed them to ashes.

Mrs. Smith made no protestations this time, and, with the simple direction that her trunk should be given to any one who called for it, Ethel left. At dusk she stood outside the door again, but did not enter. There was a stout man with her who came in and took the trunk, giving unintelligible answers to the one or two questions that were asked him.

When he and his burden were safely outside, Ethel thrust a paper into his hand and fled.

She did not see the form that followed her, a woman's, crouching, bending, walking faster when she walked faster and more slowly as her footsteps lagged through weariness. In and out, through winding streets, until, at last, Ethel disappeared into a tall building, a great rambling brick dwelling, blackened by age and weather without, filthy within, where a dozen families herded. Then the shawled figure halted, drawing a huge breath and glancing curiously about her.

"Pears to me ole colonel's grand-darter's got mighty poor lodgings now," she muttered.

"Somebody's got to pay me for dis scamper. Lord save us! I'se most gone dead for want of breff."

And stooping to put on the slipper she had just shuffled off, Yellow Jude wrapped her shawl about her and hurried back the way she had come.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN ATTACK.

It was only the next night, after Ethel left Mrs. Smith's that Walter Merritt inquired for her there in vain, and was walking through the streets in a downcast mood, when, as he passed through a dark alley-way or narrow lane, a blow fell upon him from behind, a murderous blow with a heavy cudgel, but it failed to prostrate him. He staggered on, stunned, reeling, out of the shadows into a wider thoroughfare, with a confused consciousness of some one following behind him, then swooned and fell with a heavy groan.

Almost as suddenly as if they had sprung from the earth, a crowd gathered around him.

"Drunk!" said some one.

"No, poor fellow! he is hurt," said another, who, as he bent above the injured man, revealed in the lamp-light that shone upon both the features of Oscar L'Estrange.

He was agitated. He trembled. Several of the men standing by, looked at him in much surprise.

"Is he dead?" he asked at last, with a shudder.

Some one else answered in a confident tone:

"No."

There were a hundred suggestions made, but Oscar L'Estrange touched the policeman who stood by, on his arm.

"If your law permits," he said, "I will see that the poor fellow is cared for."

"No objection to that, sir," said the man addressed. "Of course the case will be reported if it proves serious."

"But to-night we may remove him to a place

of safety. There is my card, if you find it necessary to inquire after him."

After a short delay, a cab was found, and Walter Merritt was removed to a plain hotel, where he lay all night in a deep stupor from the effects of his injury.

When the morning came he had not yet stirred, but feverish flushes were creeping up his neck and cheeks.

CHAPTER XVII.

ELLEN WADE.

THERE is no royal road to fortune. A trade or profession, anything, in fact, that is worth the doing must be reached by hard work and perseverance. Amateur productions are never quite perfect, quite workmanlike, and Ellen Wade found her needle a very poor dependence. Braiding, embroidery, knitting, bead-work, which had pleased Ethel Raymond's friends were not liked so well by critical shopmen. However, Ethel, now known by the few people in the rambling tenement house who had any curiosity about her, as Ellen Wade, persevered, living for a long time on the money she still had left, earning a little occasionally and spending it in materials for new work. Vaguely wondering sometimes what the end of it would be.

Knowing nothing of the watch that Yellow Jude had kept upon her, the girl whom we must now call Ellen Wade, felt satisfied that she was entirely cut off from all who had known her by her former name. Her lover, the woman she shuddered to call mother, the inmates of the lodging-house, all the people of her dead past life, knew nothing, as she believed, of the sewing girl in the fifth floor hall bed-room.

The time came when her money was at its last ebb, and she had no hopes of more, but before that, two incidents happened which may be mentioned in passing. The first was the reappearance of Oscar L'Estrange upon the scene, a very short reappearance, for, frightened and troubled, Ellen Wade dismissed him with words which brought an angry fire to his eye and cheek.

The other incident was the death of Mr. Raymond. It was scarcely a shock to the girl who had once thought herself his daughter, for he had long been dead to her, but when she read the notice, she yearned to know if he had remembered her or wished to see her in his last hours, and, one evening, she went to the Raymond mansion.

She was admitted by a strange servant, and asked to see the housekeeper, who had been in Mr. Raymond's service for several years. The housekeeper recognized her after a doubtful look or two, and, from her, Ethel learned that, to the last, Mr. Raymond had refused to hear his wife or her adopted daughter mentioned. She also learned that he had never written a will to replace the old one, which he had formally destroyed, after his wife's funeral. The money and estates had therefore passed to some distant relatives, who were willing to listen to Ethel's claims, if presented, and grant her a reasonable amount, reasonable in the housekeeper's shrewd opinion, meaning very small. Ethel went back to her lonely room saddened to the heart's core.

It had actually come to starvation with Ellen Wade. Her fear of meeting on one hand or another, either Walter Merritt, Oscar L'Estrange or Yellow Jude, had prevented her from seeking many positions which she might have filled.

She was, perhaps, no worse off than hundreds of girls in this city would be to-day if left to their own resources, but it had come to an empty purse, no employment and the last crust.

"Only to sit still and die," thought Ethel; "I wonder how starvation feels. I have never tried that."

Just as this thought crossed her, came a knock at her door, and she opened it to see a fresh-looking young woman standing there. In another moment she recognized Maria Bell.

"Why, it's Miss Raymond," said she, in great surprise.

"Hush!" said Ethel, involuntarily, taking her by the hand and drawing her in.

"I must be in the wrong room," said Maria Bell, "but I'm so glad to see you. Whatever possessed you to go away from Miss Smith's without saying good-by?"

"I have my own reasons, reasons I do not wish to speak of, and I have changed my name. They call me Ellen Wade here. May I ask a promise of you?" said Ethel.

"Yes, indeed," said Maria, "a hundred if you like."

"Then call me Ellen Wade. It is as much

my name as the other. You like me a little, Maria?"

"Yes, I do."

"I am sure you would not want to see me in trouble," continued Ellen Wade. "Please forget that you ever heard of Ethel Raymond. If you ever speak of me, call me by my new name."

"I swear never to tell any one, never to let any one know that I ever heard your other name," said Maria Bell, quickly, and before Ellen could prevent her, she had bound herself to keep her promise, by an oath. The oath shocked her listener, for it seemed more solemn than the occasion called for, but it relieved her at the same time.

"And now," said Maria Bell, "I'll tell you why I came. I'm living out. I can't at Miss Smith's any more, and I don't work at the factory. I'm living at Mr. Sheridan's. He's an old gentleman. There's no one in the house now but me and the cook and the coachman. The coachman's mother lives down around here and he said that Miss Ellen Wade would be glad of the place—oh, I forgot to tell you, the nurse went away. She said it was too tiresome, and Mr. Sheridan is always sick. He has to have some one to nurse him and wait on him. Do you want the place?"

"Yes," said Ethel. "It will be better than starving. That's what I expected to do to-day."

"Good gracious!" said Maria Bell, "but you haven't sold your dresses yet."

To tell the truth, such a thought had never occurred to Ellen Wade. Poverty was such a new experience, she did not know its resources. In a few minutes they were on the way together to Mr. Sheridan's house, and the first thing Maria Bell did was to drag her companion into the kitchen and insist on her eating a hearty lunch.

That over, the two went up-stairs together, to a large front room over the darkened and closely-shut parlors, and Maria Bell knocked softly at the door.

"Come in," called a sweet voice, and they entered.

An old man sat in an invalid's luxurious chair. He had a beautiful head covered with piled locks of silvery whiteness, a high forehead, a face with delicate and faultless features, and an expression in his deep gray eyes and gentle mouth that would have been angelic but for an undercurrent of pain. His form seemed emaciated, his delicate hands were as thin as it was possible for those of any human being to be.

Briefly; this man became Ellen Wade's employer, and her life went on in a quiet way. There was no one else in the house, as Maria Bell had said, but the cook, the coachman who was also an assistant-nurse, and the maid of all work herself, and Ethel waited on Mr. Sheridan all day, and slept within call at night, never leaving the house except for an occasional walk for her health, when the man-servant, John Sumner, came in to take her place.

Her position was by no means a sinecure, yet Ellen grew to love the work.

Mr. Sheridan was a man to inspire reverential love. Amiable and gentle in character, his mind was stored with rich and varied knowledge, and his heart with interest in the world from which he was totally cut off by his sad condition.

He had no relations, being an only child and a bachelor and having outlived, in his extreme old age, the very last of his name and blood. He had, he told Ellen, only one or two acquaintances in this city, which was not his native place, and the doctor, who came daily, was their only caller.

When the man-servant brought up the daily paper one morning, Ellen was somewhat startled by seeing her former name among the personals. The paragraph which caught her eyes was the following:

"If Miss Ethel Raymond will communicate with Frazer Dodge, Attorney-at-law, she will hear of something to her advantage. Call, or send address immediately, if possible, to No. — St., N. Y."

Below it was another equally significant:

"\$10.—If Judith (colored), formerly of St. Augustine, Fla., will call on Frazer Dodge, Attorney at-law, No. — St., she will hear of something to her advantage. Any one giving information of her whereabouts will receive the sum of ten dollars."

These two advertisements startled Ellen, and set her to thinking. It was more than probable, it seemed to her, that the heirs of Mr. Raymond were hunting her up so as to settle whatever claims she might choose to present, but, at the same time, half-formed fancies floated through her brain, imaginations of what might be. On the subject of Mr. Raymond's money her mind

was unaltered. She was safe from every one who knew her now. Safe from the temptation of Walter Merritt's love. It was impossible for any one to discover her whereabouts, and she hesitated to leave her retirement without good cause.

She went to Mr. Sheridan's room, carrying the paper with her. She told him her whole story, without hesitation, and asked his advice. The tears were in the old man's eyes when she had finished.

"Poor girl! poor girl!" he said. "I think you have been right in acting as you have. Do not do violence to your feelings. I will have the matter secretly inquired into so that you may not appear unless you wish, and, meanwhile, I am rich. I want you to stay with me while I live, but you will be provided for when I die. I have no relations, and no particular hobby. I cannot leave my money in better hands than yours. I am sure."

Ellen Wade hid her face in her handkerchief.

"Get me pen and ink, child," Mr. Sheridan said. "I will write my will now, and send for my lawyer this afternoon. I shall die no sooner for that."

Ellen brought a writing-desk and sat beside him writing the words which ran as follows, and were addressed to his lawyer:

"I wish to leave all my belongings to my nurse known as Ellen Wade, with the exception of one hundred dollars apiece to whatever servants may be employed in my house at the time of my death, and five thousand dollars to good Dr. Walren. Please bring the papers for my signature as soon as possible, for I feel the hand of death upon me, and wish to have this matter settled."

"Now," said Mr. Sheridan, calmly, "post this letter immediately. If, as I suspected, some one is seeking for you to make restitution for the wrongs that you have suffered, some one who knew you in your childhood, I mean, you will then be obliged to appear, but can keep your name, and be independent, whether you choose to marry or not."

Ellen felt sure that he had hit upon the real truth, some one who had known the man who would have made Yellow Jude his wife had he been able, had brought in, or perhaps allowed her claims to certain property. It mattered little to her. Nothing could come of it but money, and she was sure of money now, so she need not look forward to an impoverished old age.

She had just stamped the letter, carried it in to the kitchen to Maria Bell, and told her to see that John Sumner posted it immediately, and returned to Mr. Sheridan's room, when the street-door bell sounded through the house.

It was Doctor Walren who entered, as he expected, but some one else whom she had not expected, one whose presence had brought ill-omen to her whenever she had seen him. Her heart stood still, her frame shivered from head to foot.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CASE OF POISONING.

THE person who entered immediately after Dr. Walren, was no other than Oscar L'Estrange, while he held the hand of the doctor.

"So this is little Oscar," said Mr. Sheridan, who was still looking at him with a serious air. "I knew you at once by your resemblance to your father."

"I thought you would not object to my coming in, unannounced," said Oscar L'Estrange in the silvery voice so familiar to the ears of the former Ethel Raymond.

They shook hands together in a friendly fashion, the man who seemed to Ellen Wade a haunting evil spirit, and the one who meant to be her benefactor. Just as Oscar L'Estrange was taking a seat, his eyes fell upon the nurse, who stood by the invalid's chair, and his surprise if not real was certainly well acted.

"Has anything occurred to agitate you?" asked Dr. Walren, of his patient.

"Nothing but what I have long expected," said Mr. Sheridan. "My time is coming, doctor."

This with a gentle sigh.

Dr. Walren made no answer whatever, but still looking very grave, took a pencil and notebook from his pocket and wrote off a prescription.

"Have this—" he began, addressing Ellen Wade, and then interrupted himself.

"Stay! I will get this prescription made up myself and bring it in five minutes. But what is this? you are not well yourself, Miss Wade."

"I am not ill," said Ellen. "I have had a very slight cold," she added, remembering such to be the case.

"Let me see your tongue," said the doctor.

"Ah! a little feverish, a very little. Pulse high. Yes; must not neglect your own health if you wish to be a good nurse."

The doctor disappeared. Ellen walked to the window. She was hoping to deceive Oscar L'Estrange as to her identity. So far, she knew that she had kept her voice and countenance under perfect control. He was talking in a pleasant way to Mr. Sheridan, of some past time of which she knew nothing when Oscar had been the old man's pet. So he continued until the doctor returned.

"You will excuse the interruption, gentlemen, but I have a very short time to spare," said Dr. Walren. He took two small white packages from his pocket and went toward Ellen.

"These powders are somewhat similar in appearance," said he, "though they are differently marked. You must be careful not to confound them."

"Both for Mr. Sheridan?" asked Ellen.

"No," said the doctor, "this is for you," and he unwrapped one of the packages showing smaller ones inclosed. "To be taken on the tongue. One every hour, until the symptoms subside. But these are for Mr. Sheridan."

"I shall be very careful," said Ellen, at the same time opening the glass door of a small cabinet which stood against the wall. "See, doctor, my own I will put here on the lower shelf, and this among the other medicines on the second shelf."

As she spoke the three men looked up, each watching her action. She turned the key in the cabinet with a slight laugh, as if to reassure Doctor Walren, who took his departure, saying, with his hand on the door, "If there should be the slightest symptom of fever, send me word at once. If not, continue with the present medicine until morning. Then give one of the powders in half a glass of water after breakfast. And—that is all, at present."

He left. Oscar L'Estrange, who had not changed his position, arose a moment or two after.

"I will not weary you, my dear old friend," he said. "But you will let me come again?"

"Come often, if I am here to receive you," said Mr. Sheridan, and shook hands kindly with the young man, who left with a slight bow to Ellen Wade.

An hour or two later, the lawyer who had been summoned, appeared. He brought with him a young man, who appended his signature to the will as witness and then departed. A neighbor was summoned as second witness. The document was duly sealed and signed and deposited in the lawyer's pocket and finally in his safe.

Mr. Sheridan continued feeble, but there were no alarming symptoms of any increasing disease, and not the least fever. About eight o'clock the next morning Ellen Wade called Maria Bell to the kitchen door.

"Maria," said she, "if you will freshen the room while Mr. Sheridan is still asleep, I shall be able to give him his breakfast when I return from my walk. It is late, but I really need a little air."

"I will," said Maria, and, taking broom, brush and dust-pan, followed Ellen to the room. Ellen threw open the windows and looked out a moment, then turned the key in the cabinet where the medicines were kept and was about to drop it into her pocket, but thought better of it and let it remain.

"There will be no need of opening the cabinet," said she. "It is perfectly clean and in order."

The day was exceedingly pleasant, but Ellen did not enjoy it. There was an undefined weight of trouble hanging over her. It might have been merely the effects of seeing Oscar L'Estrange. It seemed to her like a fearful presentiment. She did not walk long or far. When she returned the room looked bright and cheerful. She took one of the powders the doctor had given her, several of which she had taken through the night, and it seemed to relieve the painful feeling of suffocation which had troubled her more or less for two days. She then procured the invalid's breakfast, set it out upon a round table, assisted him to his chair and read some portions of the morning paper to him while he ate.

The table was taken away and Ellen went to the cabinet, took the first of the powders left for Mr. Sheridan, which she found were numbered in lead pencil, from one to six, emptied it into a glass, adding water, and stirred it vigorously. The invalid drank it and leaned back in his chair.

While Ellen Wade still held glass and spoon in her hand the doctor was announced.

"I am an hour earlier than usual," was his first remark, then his eye fell on the glass in Ellen's hand.

"That is not Mr. Sheridan's medicine?" he asked.

"Yes," said Ellen, looking nervously at the cabinet. "I am sure I made no mistake. My own is almost gone."

"But," said Dr. Walren, "the color—" then he stopped and stood with a puzzled expression upon his face, holding the glass in his hand and scraping the red sediment carefully together with the spoon.

"I have been thinking a great deal about that remark you made the other day, doctor," said Mr. Sheridan, evidently repressing an expression of pain as was his wont, "about want of sympathy."

"Yes, yes," said Dr. Walren, "if we could only see into one another's hearts, perhaps we should find there was no such great difference between the worst and the best of us. Circumstance has made many a villain."

"Perhaps in the next life," began the invalid, slowly and painfully. Then there came into his eyes a strange, intense, far-away look, a blue-white hue stole over his pallid skin. He cried out suddenly, in quite a different voice:

"Oh, Lord, receive my spirit!" and then with some gasping, half-uttered sounds flung his quivering arms aloft and fell to the floor dead.

The sound of the heavy fall brought Maria Bell and John Sumner to the door, just as Ellen Wade and the doctor were lifting the prostrate form, a living man no more forever.

Ellen bent above the still, white face, trembling in every limb. Dr. Walren was trembling, too. His teeth were clenched, his mouth stern and hard. He turned to John Sumner and whispered something in his ear, then to Maria Bell, who was sobbing and wringing her hands.

"Go you to this address," he said, taking pencil and paper from his pocket-book and hastily inditing a few words. "Ask if Dr. Brown is at home. If not, leave word for him to come immediately."

Ellen Wade still stood looking, staring at the still, white face, with eyes for nothing else. The doctor set the glass with the dull-red sediment in it upon the mantel-shelf, laid the spoon across, looked fixedly at the dead man whom they had placed in his invalid-chair again, adjusting it horizontally so as to form a bed, then walked up and down, up and down in his creaking boots, waiting for the return of his messengers.

They came, together, bringing with them a man who walked up to the invalid-chair at once and lifted the pulseless hands in his, and another who stood against the closed door, looking on, grim and attentive.

"Past all recovery," said the strange doctor, presently.

Dr. Walren fixed his eyes on Ellen Wade and turned to the other stranger.

"Arrest this woman in the name of the law for the murder of Willis Sheridan. I saw the deed done with my own eyes," he said.

The man stared as if he doubted his own ears. Ellen Wade turned upon Dr. Walren with a face as corpse-like as the face of Willis Sheridan, her eyes growing larger and larger, steadied at last, in a stony stare. Maria Bell caught John Sumner's hand, fell to sobbing vehemently, crying out through her sobs:

"It couldn't be her fault. She never did it!"

Just then came a knock, and the cook, who had but recently come to the place, said timidly to the stranger at the door:

"Please, sir, there's two strangers waiting outside," and then: "Is there aught the matter?"

"Matter enough," said the man. Then two other strangers entered.

"We've stepped round to see what's up," said the first as he walked in.

"This," said Dr. Walren. "I will tell you now, what I am ready to testify hereafter. Mr. Sheridan has been an invalid for years, and I was his attendant physician. Yesterday his symptoms were somewhat unpromising. I ordered him a simple harmless prescription that could not hurt a child, saw it made up with my own eyes. To-day I find his faithful nurse giving him a deadly poison."

"Doctor," gasped Ellen Wade, finding breath at last, "it was in the paper you gave me. You saw me place it in the cabinet. I have not removed it since until this morning."

Dr. Walren stalked to the cabinet, picked up the package which still lay in its place among the bottles, also the one on the shelf below,

which still had one small powder in it, then took a folding leather-case from his pocket, from a compartment of which he drew two small papers.

He unfolded the five remaining powders, on the wrapper of which were directions in his own handwriting, showing only a white and glistening substance, then the one remaining one in the package that had been placed upon the lower shelf, exactly similar in appearance.

"You see, gentlemen," said Dr. Walren, "there is no shadow of doubt left, no possibility of any mistake. The color of this substance in the glass is unlike the prescription even. The chemist at this corner, Jamieson, will show his prescription corresponding to mine. I came immediately from his shop."

That night Ellen Wade slept in a prison-cell, indicted for the murder of Willis Sheridan by means of a deadly poison. "*Terro Prussici Potassium*," as the physician's evidence gave it.

The summing up was as follows: Ellen Wade, nurse to the murdered man, had received from the hands of his physician a harmless drug and had administered poison, being caught in the act by said physician, who happened on the day of the poisoning to arrive at the house earlier than was his custom.

Of the other inmates of the house, no one had entered the apartment where the medicines were kept with the exception of Maria Bell; who had spent half an hour there by direction of the prisoner, while said prisoner was absent from the house. John Sumner during that time had been at market ordering provisions, and the cook busy in the kitchen.

It seemed that no outsider could have tampered with the medicines, as the apartment where they were had only three doors of communication, one into the sleeping apartment of the invalid, one into that of Ellen Wade, and the other, habitually locked on the inside at night, into the outer hall.

The prisoner alone of those interested knew of the will, executed impromptu the day previous, and by which she principally benefited. Ellen Wade gave no account of her previous life or antecedents, simply saying that she had earned her living by sewing before her present situation was offered to her through the means of John Sumner, who had only known her by hearsay.

A certain Oscar L'Estrange who had visited at the house of the deceased the day before his death and, as it happened, at the same time as the doctor, had met her previously in the employment of a relative, from whose service she had been dismissed under circumstances which reflected little credit upon her character.

This mysterious case of poisoning was published far and wide in the daily papers. The trial could not take place for three months.

As in all other cases of poisoning, but two verdicts were possible; murder in the first degree or not guilty.

CHAPTER XIX.

A DISCOVERY.

HOLLOW murmurs, gurgling, surging sounds as of rushing torrents, mysterious, unmeaning whispers, formed themselves, at last, into human voices, carrying on an animated conversation, and Walter Merritt opened his eyes on a plain, unpretending room, furnished neatly enough but with that unmistakable air of articles thrown together for convenience, without reference to any individual taste, which belongs to hotels and lodging-houses in general.

His mind was quite clear. He remembered everything up to the time of his fall. After that was a complete blank. By the fire sat two people with a table between them, feasting on bacon and onions, interspersed with draughts of aromatic and steaming coffee, a man of the darkest hue of the African race, and a woman already known in these pages as Yellow Jude.

The latter was in high glee, narrating a story of her past life. Walter Merritt heard without heeding her words, intent on other thoughts, until a familiar name caught his ear. With a sudden intuition he let his eyelids fall, turned his face to the pillow and listened eagerly.

"Ethel Raymond," said the woman, "dat ar's de name, and I'll tell you how I got such a mighty good chance:

"You see our ole massa, Colonel Montijeo, he was mighty proud and stuck-up-like as he got good reason to be, and his son Carlos he went and fell in love wid some o' de poor white trash what lives in dem dar low streets, down at St. Augustine, mighty pooty gal, too, but Lor! wasn't ole colonel mad about it!

"Well, he says, says he, 'if my son, born ob

dis mighty fine ole Spanish blood, if my son done gone marry sech low trash," sez he, "he shall never darken my doors again," says he.

"Carlos he was mighty proud too, and when he hears that he sez, sez he, 'I won't be turned out twice,' sez he, 'and I'll marry her ef I like,' so off he goes and they didn't done hear nothing about him for a year'n more.

"Ole colonel he went about lookin' like he was goin' to die, but he nebber said nothin' to nobody, so mighty proud! you see.

"Well, I was sayin', 'bout de end ob a year I was a settin' in my place and ef der warn't a mighty big storm outside I'd done talkin'. Den dere comes a knock at de door, rat tat tat, jess like dat, and I hears a voice sayin': 'Jude, you Jude.' Thinks I, that's Simon for shure.

"Well, 'nother minute, in comes colonel's darter in law. Didn't hardly know her at firs, an' she sets down front my fire and sez she, 'Jude, I'm a-dyin'.' Well, ef I warn't obfuscated! She done got a little baby in her lap, right in its bar' skin.

"She was dressed worse'n any nigger, a long sight.

"Well, she don't died right thar an' she don't tell me dat de colonel's son, Carlos, he was done gone dead, too, and, sez she, 'Jude,' says she, 'take my baby to ole colonel,' says she, 'an' tell him dat ar's his gran'chile.' I was mighty 'fraid ob ole colonel for fear what he might do when I done tell him.

"I was a-thinkin' 'bout dat ar when Jim he comes to see me. Jim was my ole man 'bout dose ar times, but Lor! I didn't think bery much o' him.

"Says I, 'dat ar's ole colonel's darter-in-law,' and golly! how he shivered. But after a while, says he, 'Jude, I know a lady what would give millions o' money for dat ar infant.'

"It seems dar was a lady stayin' down dar for her healf, an' she'd done gone pizened her baby, by accident, and was mighty anxious to get another—rich Norvern lady, name o' Raymond, as I was a-tellin' you.

"Well, Jim, he put me up to goin' dar. He was to have half the money, you see, to go up Norff wid.

"I went to dat ar lady an' I tole her dat ar chile was an orphan and hadn't no father nor no mother; I tole her dat its mover had don't gone ask me to get some good lady to take care of it, and I tell'd what the expenses of the funeral wasn't paid, and what a lot o' trouble dat ar chile had guv me, and she forked 'bout a bushel o' money."

"Bushel!" said the black man, derisively.

"Yes, 'bout a bushel. Jim he got the moss of it, but I tell you, I lived mighty fine for a while; I had camel's hair shawls, and silk dresses, and oll sorts ob fine things. All dose ar niggers bowed down to me and handed me about's if I was white as chalk.

"I was moss scared to deff, dough, when I was a-comin' away from dat ar white lady's, Mrs. Raymond's. I see Massa Doctor. 'Peared to me like he might go an' tell ole colonel I'd stole a picanniny."

"Eh! How did Massa Doctor know anything about dat ar chile? You're stuffin' me, Jude," said Jude's companion.

"No, I an't neither. I done forgot to tell you the best part ob my story.

"You see, whenever any of us nigger wenchies we got a chile, ole colonel he was always mighty pleased an' he always gives us a mighty fine present, so I thinks to myself dat I might as well has dat ar present, too, so I got Jim to put ole colonel's darter-in-law in de woodshed, an' I sends my Pedro down dar to put his back ag'in' the door. Den I goes to bed, and takes ole colonel's grand-darter 'long o' me, an' I sends for ole colonel an' de doctor.

"Reg'lar massa doctor, he warn't dar, but dar was a doctor visitin' ole colonel, an' dey boff comes down, an' de ole colonel shows his teeth an' look mighty pleasant, an' de strange massa doctor, he says:

"She's a strong one," says he, an' he looks mighty s'prised when he sees my littlest, but ole colonel he didn't know'n better. Thought it war mine, sure, sartain. So I got my present."

"Laws! but you were smart, Jude!" said the man. "But how did that turn out about de doctor?"

"Oh, yes, as I was about to say," continued Jude, "massa doctor didn't say nothin', not a word, and I didn't say nothin' neither, but one day I sees him, and says he:

"Your chile's gettin' 'long mighty fine," says he, 'Jude.'

"Says I, 'Mighty glad to hear dat, massa doctor,' says I.

"Sing'lar!" says he, 'mighty sing'lar!'

"He didn't say what, but I knew well enough he was thinkin' mighty sing'lar white lady should 'dopt nigger Jude's chile.

"Soon as we got free, I went to massa doctor.

"Says I—Jim tole me what to say."

"I thought Jim went up Norff wid dat ar bushel o' money," interrupted the man.

"Well, he did," said Jude, "but he come down again. Can't you let me talk? Says I:

"Massa doctor, 'pears like my chile what ole colonel sold to dat ar Norvern lady, Mrs. Raymond,' says I. 'Pears like she muss be purty big. 'Pears like I'd joy to see her again.'

"'Pears like you might,' says he.

"Says I:

"Does you think I might git her back?"

"Says he:

"No, doubt."

"So says I:

"Massa doctor, couldn't you gib me a stiff-cat dat she war mine?"

"Yas," says he, and he takes his paper out and writes me dis yere stiffcat," and Yellow Jude took a paper from the bosom of her dress.

"What's dat fur?" asked her companion.

"Isn't I jess goin' to tell yer?" said Jude.

"I wanted ter git some money out o' somebody, so I comed Norff. Jim was a-goin' to bring me, but Lor! Jim an't no sort of a man. I don't think much ob him, nohow."

"He's all talk, an' no cider!"

"Yah! yah! yah!" laughed both in chorus.

"Well," said the woman, "dat ar Mrs. Raymond, she buyed me off a great many times. She was scared ob her husband. Mighty pompous man! her husband war. Bress your soul and body! He didn't know dat chile warn't his'n. But soon as dat ar Mrs. Raymond, she done gone dead, de gemman said he didn't want nuffin to do with nigger wench's daughter.

"I've been scootin' round scarin' her eber since, and now she's gone, flowed—whar, I don't know more'n Simon."

With these words Yellow Jude turned and looked fixedly at the bed.

"Dat gemman is jess about well," said she. "Tell dat by de color of him's skin."

Walter Merritt turned his head with an involuntary sound, half sigh, half groan.

He opened his eyes slowly, determining to feign unconsciousness, if that were possible; but the woman's quick glance, her gesture to her companion, which caused him to remove the remains of the supper with neatness and dispatch, proved that she could not be deceived.

"Massa L'Estrange will be glad to hear dat you's well," said Yellow Jude. "He takes a mighty heap of interest in you."

"And who is Mr. L'Estrange?" asked Walter.

"Suvern gemman ob distinction," was the answer, "what picked you up when somebody done gone knocked you down in the streets. He tole me very particular you wasn't to be at no expense. He's paid the doctor and the hotel-keeper. All you got ter do is to get along out ob here soon's you're well."

CHAPTER XX.

WALTER MERRITT FINDS EMPLOYMENT.

To find Ethel was Walter Merritt's first wish—to tell her the news that he had learned! How this was to be accomplished he had no idea; but he had firm faith in the theory that "strong desire amounts to prophecy," and meant to bring his desire to pass in some way.

The facts that Yellow Jude had narrated could of course be substantiated in some way; but as yet he had only hearsay evidence from a source which would scarcely command credence. It would be of no use to publish such information, and until he had found Ethel and confirmed the truth of the story he determined not to return to his friends unless driven by actual want.

He laughed at the idea of starvation for a few days, even though he had discovered that all his money but a little loose change had been stolen or lost from his pockets. It was not long before the case grew serious. The fact that he was not worth his salt, unaided, or, at least, that there was no available way for him to earn it, was very humiliating, yet none the less a fact.

Respectable bankers, dry-goods merchants, employers of all kinds, had hundreds of young men at hand to choose from, young men who could "read, write and cipher" quite as well as Walter Merritt, and who had besides recommendations and, dreadful word—experience.

Difficulties only spurred him on for a while; but, when his funds had diminished a little more, he found that an insufficient breakfast

and a few hours' trudging scarcely fit a man for displaying skill either of muscle or mind.

He foresaw that he must return home, where, as he had no present intention of marrying, he would be well received and looked forward to a complete reconciliation, when the true story of Ethel's birth should be known. He liked to think how eager his mother and sisters would be to offer her reparation.

Having mentally declared himself incapable of any useful thing, which, however, was far from being the case, he had determined to return home and make the humiliating confession, and then set to work, in earnest, with his father's assistance and acquired practical education.

Having arrived at this wise conclusion, he spent his last remaining currency in a miserable restaurant for a cup of execrable coffee and a stale roll, and was about to depart for the paternal mansion when a paper, lying upon a table near by, caught his eye.

He picked it up, and the advertisement which first attracted his attention was the one Ethel had noticed referring to herself. The one below it carried its full significance to him, and he was overjoyed with the idea that he might have a double piece of good news to impart.

He made his way with haste to the office of Frazer Dodge, and inquired for that gentleman of a young colored man who opened the door of the outer office. He was shown to a small inner room immediately, and confronted the lawyer, who was a small man with an immense quantity of white forehead, a very spare quantity of wiry hair streaked with gray, and two small, dancing eyes, with an incredible depth of power and meaning in them.

"I have come," said Walter Merritt, "in reference to your advertisement of this morning. I am acquainted with both the parties advertised for."

The young colored man before mentioned laid down the pen with which he was writing at a desk. Walter glanced at him as if he supposed the lawyer would dismiss him. Mr. Dodge said, smilingly:

"I will call you in a few minutes, Pedro," when he took his papers to a desk in the outer room and fell to work. "You have come from Miss Montijeo, probably known to you by the name of Raymond?"

Walter handed Lawyer Dodge his card, which the other pocketed, having first glanced at it.

"No, sir; I have come to bring what may prove valuable information or otherwise—I have no means of judging. Is she supposed to be of African descent?"

"No, sir," said Lawyer Dodge, "we had discovered her to be the granddaughter of Col. Alvaraez Montijeo, now living in St. Augustine, and anxious to receive her. She will be an heiress. But our advertisement has been in nearly a week."

"And no answer?"

"No answer; and as yet no clue to either party."

"I will tell you my story," said Walter, "as briefly as I can. I was engaged to Miss Ethel Raymond, and we were about to be married, when the news burst upon us that she was the child of a woman named Judith."

"Yellow Jude. Yes," said the lawyer, nodding.

"Her adopted mother died of the shock of the discovery. Mr. Raymond acted in a most—"

"Yes, yes. So much we know," said Lawyer Dodge. "She left home."

"After the first shock of the discovery," continued Walter, "I found that my feelings toward her were unchanged. I—I quarreled with my relatives on her account—for I determined that I would marry her, if she would have me, in spite of everything. My father was equally determined that I should not; so we parted. I met her, by accident, shortly after; found that she had been at work, was out of one place looking for another. Meanwhile, being unable to take care of myself, I could not help her. She suddenly disappeared; and, just at that time, I received a blow on the head that left me unconscious for some time. And now comes my information, whatever it may be worth. I was nursed by a woman called Yellow Jude, at a small hotel called the Orleans House, and the woman was hired for the purpose by a gentleman named L'Estrange."

"L'Estrange?" asked Lawyer Dodge.

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"A mere coincidence, perhaps; but that is the name of the widow Colonel Montijeo married. This woman gave you information?"

"Unconsciously. She thought me asleep, and related the whole story of the deception."

"One question, please," said the lawyer, drawing a note-book from his pocket. "Where did you first meet Miss Raymond?"

"Outside of a restaurant in — street. She was going to the house of a Mrs. Smith." Walter Merritt added the address. "We went together to the S— Bank, where she drew a check."

"Mr. Merritt," said the lawyer, "I tell you frankly, I fear there is some curious devilry at work in this affair. I see you are interested. You are intelligent; of fine, unobtrusive appearance—is there any possibility of my procuring your services? The fact that Miss Raymond and the colored woman have not appeared means something, and something serious. Yellow Jude would come any distance merely for the ten dollars reward alone. She's a mercenary, unreasoning creature. There's some deeper mind than hers at work. Young Pedro," indicating the young mulatto in the other room, "is her son, who witnessed the transaction between her and 'White Jim'—the burial of Isabella Montijeo. A fine young fellow. And now, what do you say to my proposition?"

"I accept it with thanks; and will enter into any work you give me with all my heart and soul," replied Walter.

"Come home with me and talk it over," said Lawyer Dodge. "I am just going to lunch."

Walter Merritt went home with the lawyer, as invited, and became an inmate of his house while prosecuting the search for the lost Ethel. He imparted all the facts that had transpired—giving Lawyer Dodge his fullest confidence. The short interview with Oscar L'Estrange, the remarks that Mrs. Smith had made, when he inquired for Ethel at her lodging-house—grumbly in reference to Yellow Jude, whom she designated as "niggers."

His first task was to search through the books of teachers' agencies, and other places where employment was found. They discovered the fact that Oscar L'Estrange had procured Ethel her first situation; at Mrs. Garth's, they ascertained the fact that she had remained in that situation for over two months, the date agreeing exactly with the time of Walter's meeting with her. Her name was registered at the bank, in connection with Mr. Garth's check, the young man who had received it having preserved a memorandum of the affair, and remembering Walter Merritt perfectly. There all clue suddenly ceased.

Meanwhile the advertisements remained unanswered. Walter's inquiries at the hotel had elicited nothing except that the man whom he had seen with Yellow Jude was sometimes employed there as a porter, and a promise that he should be sent to Lawyer Dodge's office when he next presented himself.

It happened that Walter, on one of his expeditions, came across this man. He had taken certain hints from Frazer Dodge, and did not at once betray his motive. It was evident that he had been warned against betraying Yellow Jude's whereabouts; but a little money worked a change in the man's whole manner, and, with many meaning nods and mysterious whispers, he imparted the desired knowledge.

CHAPTER XXI.

YELLOW JUDE SURPRISED.

In a dilapidated shanty, banked in by high brick walls, Yellow Jude sat in a small, low room, from the walls of which the plastering and paper had fallen together, leaving immense spaces of bare laths. The whole place was an epitome of squalor, from the greasy, ragged carpet and the stove with its pipe thrust through a broken pane of the window, to the smoke-blackened ceiling.

A mahogany table, bereft of one leaf and bolstered against the wall to its proper balance, was spread with a score of greasy cards, over which the yellow-turbaned head nodded sagaciously, and opposite the mistress of the apartment sat a fat and smiling negress.

"Ye see, Jude," said this woman, "I dreamt that I was a-standing on a telegraph-pole a-shouting, so I jes' thought I'd come and ask you what that was fur. Maybe it might be fur a lucky number, that's what I was a-thinking. 'Bout time some money came in. 'Pears to me it don't do nothin' but go out, and what to do 'bout brekfuss for my ole man and me to-morrow I don't know. I can't go griddle-cakes 'thout squinches, nohow. I do love squinch presarbes."

"You know you owe me a quarter now," said Yellow Jude, looking up as she paused in some

real or pretended calculation on the cards before her, and just then came a sharp rap at the rattling door.

With a dextrous hand the mulatto woman swept the cards into her lap under the apron she wore, and the negress rose.

"I'll drop in again 'fore I goes to bed," said she. "I's got some ironin' to do yet," and so saying betook herself away.

As she stepped out two persons stepped in, Mr. Frazer Dodge and Walter Merritt. The latter remained standing by the door, the former sat down on one of the broken-seated cane chairs, with an air of ease and familiarity astonishing to behold.

"Good-evening, madam," said he, at the same time handing her a package of tobacco, wrapped in shining tin-foil.

Her crafty face broke into a smile and she eagerly snatched at the proffered gift.

"Dunno dese gemmen, though," said she.

"Oh, yes," said Lawyer Dodge. "At least this gentleman remembers his nurse at the Orleans House. I think he wants to give you something handsome for being so careful of him."

"Mighty glad to hear dat!" said Yellow Jude. "I was keeful ob his health. Awful skeered all the time for fear he'd ketch cold and hab a collapse, too."

"We'd like to know where Mr. L'Estrange lives, Jude," said Lawyer Dodge.

Yellow Jude's face became an utter blank in an instant.

"Nebor heard ob no gemman ob dat name," she said.

"The gentleman who was so kind to Mr. Merritt," said Mr. Dodge.

"Oh, him. Dat was a gemman name ob Brown, I think. Can't say for sartin. I don't know whar he done gone to."

The lawyer dropped the subject for the time being, and said, looking meditatively at the stove:

"How do you like living up North, Jude?"

"Mighty well, sah."

"Where were you brought up?"

"On de plantation of Colonel Pedro Aharaez Montijeo, in St. Augustine, State of Florida. My grandfather, he was an African prince."

"Indeed!" said the lawyer. "Did you leave many of your children in the south?"

"Only Araminta Eulalie. She went to Alabama. She could dress ladies' hair beautiful. Smartest girl you eber see'd. Rest on 'em all scattered up North. There was one ob mine 'dopted by white folks in her infanticide. Ethel Raymond they called her. You see her old mammy was a slabe and I wanted her to 'joy the precious pibileges ob liberty."

"Now, Jude," interrupted Mr. Dodge, "you know you invented that story to get out of trouble with Colonel Montijeo. He's very anxious to find his granddaughter now."

"Eh, what's that?" asked Yellow Jude, apparently startled into a paroxysm of fear.

"He's quite willing to reward any one who knows where she is."

"I don't," said the woman. "Wish I did! But she ain't here. Didn't I have a doctor's stificat? Ain't I got it now?"

"Yes," said Lawyer Dodge. "We know that, but you know that wasn't legal. You might get into trouble by that, you know. Such things are not allowed in the North. Suppose some one had seen Miss Bella come to your cabin to die?"

Yellow Jude's teeth fairly rattled. Her eyes rolled fearfully.

"Dey didn't," she said, under her breath. Nobody, 'thout it was a sperrit."

"Suppose they had seen you and Jim bury her in the slave's lot?"

"What'll they do to me? It ain't true," said the woman.

"Now, Jude, don't commit yourself," said the lawyer. "You might as well own up. There's more to be got by owning up than by denying it."

Then he opened the door which looked out on the platform of a rickety flight of steps, which led to the yard below, and gave a little whistle.

Pedro appeared.

"Now tell Jude what you remember about Isabella Montijeo," said the lawyer.

The effect of this sudden appearance on Jude was not exactly what any one present anticipated. She sat down again on the chair from which she had risen in her fright, put her hands on her knees and burst into a prolonged and hearty laugh.

"Lor, now," said she, as soon as she could speak. "if that ain't my Pedro Montijeo. Wal, if he ain't a reg'lar gentleman I'd like to know.

Mos' as good as white folks. You went and told on your ole mammy, did yer? Who'd 'a' thought you knowed so much?"

"How d'ye do, mother?" said Pedro. "You see the old colonel was looking for his son when the plantation hands broke up long after you left and I thought it was right to let him know. He didn't blame you. He knew you didn't mean any harm, or, anyway, all he wants is to find the daughter. Where is she, mother?"

"True as you live, I don't know," said Jude.

Lawyer Dodge whipped a portable inkstand from his pocket, then, referring to a memorandum-book, took from another pocket a folded sheet of parchment, and, with the gold pen which hung from his watch-chain, inscribed a confession of Yellow Jude's perfidy, couched in the plainest terms, which he read for the edification of the assembled party.

His next proceeding was to donate ten dollars to that interesting female, possibly for the purpose of healing her wounded feelings and making her communicative.

"Now, Jude," said he, "can you write your name?"

"Yes, I kin," she said, and the document was handed to her for her signature, which soon straggled across the parchment, accompanied by many sprawling ink-blots and scratches.

"There, now," said she, "my littlest taught me to do that."

Pedro and Walter Merritt also appended their names as witnesses, and so Ethel Raymond's title to the name and inheritance of Montijeo was established.

"You failed to get Mr. L'Estrange's address," said Walter, as he and the lawyer walked away together, leaving Pedro behind them.

"Yes," said the other, "but I discovered what I wanted to know, at least to my own satisfaction. A man who lives at hotels can easily be found, if it should prove necessary or advisable to see him or would answer any purpose. What I wanted was to know whether he was interested, in some way, in keeping Miss Montijeo in ignorance of her good fortune."

"The widow L'Estrange, whom Col. Montijeo married, has a grown son, and that son paid a visit to Yellow Jude in St. Augustine, after the discovery was made. So much I learned some time ago."

"How have they managed to keep the young lady from appearing? That is our next question."

"And how to find her?" said Walter Merritt, sadly.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MURDER TRIAL.

"THIS is a curious murder case," said Frazer Dodge, laying down his newspaper. "Been reading it, Merritt? About this Ellen Wade."

"No," said Walter, "I don't much care for murder cases, in general. What is this about?"

"The nurse-girl has poisoned her employer, a rich old gentleman, who was a sort of literary man in his youth, and seems to have been an exceptionally good and amiable person."

"There isn't the least doubt about the poisoning, as I understand it. The physician came in just as the man had swallowed it, a big dose of red prussiate of potash, and he had given something, I forget what, some perfectly harmless white powder."

"The girl claims not to have known what was in the paper, nor even to have opened it until she gave it to the sick man, but the physician's character is undoubted, the evidence of the prescription perfectly positive, and no one could, by any possibility, have tampered with the package, excepting the housemaid who was in a short time sweeping the room."

"What was the motive for the crime?" asked Walter.

"The motive? Yes. That's what puzzles me," replied the other. "The girl was a poor sewing-girl who lived in a wretched tenement-house, and seems to have been very much bettered by her position. The man was kind to her, and had just written a will in her favor."

"It must have been impatience for riches; but such fearful ingratitude is hardly credible, and she seems to have made a very good impression on the servants."

"The housemaid, Maria Bell, broke out sobbing, and said—let me see—here it is—'burst out sobbing violently, and screamed wildly. 'Oh, don't, please, hang her! She's just as good and sweet as she can be. She wouldn't poison anybody. Oh, I know she wouldn't.'"

"The case is not through yet, but the evidence seems quite complete already. There can be but one verdict, I think."

"By the way, one of the witnesses is named L'Estrange. Curious coincidence that we should come across the name again! It is by no means a common one. Merritt, we must find the man—our L'Estrange, I mean—without loss of time. Everything else has failed. Oscar his name is."

"Let me see," he added, turning the newspaper. "This one's is Emil."

"You don't think Miss Montijeo would have married him?"

"I do not," said Walter, "yet I know nothing of what had passed between them, except his own words. He offered her marriage. She was not a girl, as you know by evidence, to do anything from mercenary motives and it was plain to me that she cared nothing for him. What is your idea about him?"

"My ideas, of course, are founded only on the evidence I have gleaned."

"His mother was a widow, extravagant and poor, judging by the debts she left behind her in New Orleans; the son knew how to spend money, apparently, when he was a mere boy in years. He was doubtless looking forward to inherit his stepfather's unincumbered property, when suddenly an heiress was heard of. What does he do? Immediately he visits the woman who holds the secret of the heiress' whereabouts. He then comes to New York. It happening that she is hunting for a governess' situation, he secures a position for the party in question where she will be accessible to his own advances, offers himself twice. It seems a clear case."

"Do you suppose the woman knows where Ethel is?" asked Walter.

"Decidedly not, I should say," was the answer. "I do not yet understand how far she and L'Estrange are acting in concert. The blackmailing of Mrs. Raymond I should not have thought could be his suggestion, although even that is possible."

"After failing to marry her, if he were a villain, his next wish would be to get her out of the way—"

"I beg your pardon, Merritt. It's only a 'case' to me. I forgot your interest in the matter. This anxiety is telling on you. We must go to work to-morrow and look up the missing man."

"Perhaps Jude can be bribed. I think it more than likely. If not the hotel books are our guide, I tried a letter to his mother, as I told you I would. She gives me no information. Does not know where he is stopping; is not even sure that he is in New York, as she has no correspondence with him."

"Good-night, Merritt," he said, for Walter had risen to retire. "I have a little writing to do, but I shan't sit up long. We must be fresh for our work in the morning."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE VERDICT.

"GUILTY of murder in the first degree," said Frazer Dodge, laying the paper down on his bachelor breakfast-table, and taking a sip of coffee. "Well, that was what I expected. I must finish reading the evidence in the evening. What a world it is, to be sure. Now for work."

Walter's eyes had fallen, mechanically, on the outspread sheet. Suddenly they dilated with horror. A look of inexpressible agony passed over his features. He tried to speak but his lips only moved in dumb silence. He pointed to a paragraph in one of the columns, thrust the paper toward the lawyer, with a shaking hand and fell back into his chair, gasping:

"Great God! My Ethel!"

The lawyer read slowly, carefully, without uttering an ejaculation, from one end of the column to the other, then aloud:

"The prisoner was discovered by certain persons who attended the trial, to be identical with a young woman named Ethel Raymond, who was floating around impecuniously in search of lucrative employment, some time since."

"It will be remembered, that, at the preliminary trial three months since, one of the witnesses, Emil L'Estrange, testified to having met the prisoner previously at the house of a Mr. Garth. It has since transpired that she was there employed as governess of a young and beautiful daughter, but found other employment of a different nature for herself, particulars of which we do not hear. She was dismissed in disgrace."

"It reflects credit on the kindly heart and manliness of Mr. L'Estrange, a gentleman who belongs to the Southern aristocracy, that he withheld this statement at the later trial, from compassion for the criminal who has the form of a woman, and, strange to say, a very seduc-

tive and charming one, and the heart, alas! of a fiend."

After reading this, the lawyer sat in meditation some minutes, so many that Walter Merritt, stunned and bewildered by the first shock, had regained his senses and stood chafing at his silence. The blow, instead of prostrating Ethel's lover, had, by putting horrible facts in the place of vague imaginations and speculations, given his active mind something to lay hold upon, and for the time, at least, he believed that such strength of will as his must accomplish its object, in spite of every obstacle.

Inexorable fate, cruel circumstance, the coming shadow of a ghastly death seemed puny enemies before his single-handed might.

The hallucination was so real it amounted to insanity, and the look of elation on his face—such a look as a strong man gives, breasting a fierce wind, evidently suggested the idea of insanity to his companion.

"Come, come," said the lawyer, "we mustn't take it that way. Let us go and see her. I say—"

But here he broke down. He had actually nothing to say, expected to see Walter Merritt go raving mad before his eyes the next instant, and felt that there was no comfort to be given.

The "case" was as nothing. In his strong sympathy with this young man, whom he had grown to like sincerely, he could think of nothing else.

"We must save her now, somehow," said Walter Merritt, speaking somewhat hurriedly and excitedly. "Of course you know she is innocent. Money is the only power, hers and mine; it is all at your disposal. For Heaven's sake give me all your mind, for I feel as if mine were going?"

To explain the reference to his money, we must here mention that Walter Merritt had become reconciled to his relations, who were now in deep sympathy with Ethel Raymond, while, as yet, they little knew that she and the Ellen Wade from whom their very thoughts recoiled, were one and the same person.

"We will go and see her," said the lawyer, gravely.

Ethel's innocence was only a remote possibility to him. He had seen the downfall of noble natures, knew that temptation often conquered principle. The only evidence that weighed a feather's weight with him, was, the fact that Ethel had already refused money and a man's protection when she had only to stretch out her hand for either and was in need of both.

But in both these cases pride was involved, he reasoned within himself.

In the present there was a feeble, perhaps to her thinking, a worthless life to annihilate, and she would have risen triumphant to independent riches, if her crime had remained a secret.

Pale as death, almost as motionless, Ethel sat in her cell, doomed, despairing, wondering at the fate that had come upon her. Already she had been besieged by visitors. She scarcely noticed when some one whispered to her that two men were waiting, and Walter Merritt and his companion entered.

Words are but half of any conversation, and of the one that followed, between Ethel and Walter, perhaps they were not so much. The situation was one not easily to be appreciated, except by the miserable few who have passed through such an ordeal, but Walter's presence and sympathy moved the stagnant pulses of life in Ethel's bosom. She moved, she felt, she became again a living woman though a stricken one.

The man who paced the cell keeping watch upon her, leaned sobbing against the wall at last, the sense of emotion had penetrated to his very heart, used as he was to witnessing the last hours of condemned criminals.

"My poor Ethel!" said Walter, "will it be a little comfort to you to know that your mother was a woman you could have loved—?"

"Not my miserable persecutor!" said Ethel, not taken by surprise at this strange intelligence, the great surprise of her terrible fate having swallowed up all possibility of any other.

Then she added devoutly:

"Thank God!"

It seemed to the jailer a serious thanksgiving, coming from the lips of a girl whose interest in life was done forever, to whose despairing cup no human scorn could add one bitter drop. Her lover, perhaps was the only one who understood it.

"As time is limited for the day," said Lawyer Dodge, "perhaps we had better not enter into particulars. I would like to ask a few questions."

Ethel looked up in surprise, but the lawyer

followed fast with his questions and her answers followed them, quick and terse, showing that her mind was unshaken by the terrors she had passed through.

"Do you suspect any one of having given the poison?"

"I can not. Maria Bell is certainly my friend. I feel certain of that, and I am equally certain that no one else entered the room at any time."

"You still adhere to the statement you made at the preliminary trial, about securing the doors and windows before you retired. You are quite satisfied with those statements as representing the truth. Was there nothing you would wish to have stated differently?"

"Nothing. It was quite correct."

"According to the newspaper plans there were no possible hiding-places. Low beds. No closets but the cabinet and hanging shelves?"

"There was no possibility of any one being concealed."

"Have you yourself any idea how the medicine might have been changed as it undoubtedly was?"

"None, but I have an enemy and he was present in the room when the medicine was left with me."

"Had he any opportunity of touching either package?"

"None."

"Did he attend to Dr. Walren's words?"

"Very carefully."

"Why was he your enemy?"

"Because I refused him three times. Refused to marry him. The first time, I remember distinctly, he said:

"I could have been the best of friends or the worst of enemies. Remember it is you who have chosen."

"Why did you not speak of this at the trial?"

"I saw there was no evidence against him and I did not want others to learn who I was, whichever way my fate turned. I might have spared myself the trouble of concealment. The very women who were to have been my bridesmaids have come to gape at me as if I were a wild beast."

"One more: was there any intimacy between John Sumner and Maria Bell?"

"He was courting her, she told me, and she seemed to like him. Why do you ask me these questions? Is there any hope?"

"Not unless your innocence could be proven, and that speedily. Money will do nothing in this case."

The lawyer pondered perhaps a few seconds, then added another question.

"Why did you leave Mrs. Smith's lodgings so suddenly?"

"The woman—Jude—came there. It made me determined that Walter should never see me again."

"You went then, immediately to the tenement house?"

"Immediately. There Mr. L'Estrange saw me for the last time before that dreadful day. He was my only visitor, until Maria Bell came to see me, when I was at the point of starvation. She told me that John Sumner's mother, who lived in the house, had recommended me for a nurse."

"Did you know the woman?"

"No. I never heard of her. John Sumner afterward said she did not live in the neighborhood."

"Did you ever speak to Maria Bell on the subject?"

"No. It seemed of no importance to me, and I did not like to ask her such a question. I thought she might possibly have had some reason of her own for saying what was not exactly true."

The warden, who had drawn near, listening eagerly and suspiciously, moved away as he gave the signal that the interview must end, and Walter, bending down to press a kiss on Ethel's lips, whispered:

"Ethel, I will save you, or die myself at the same hour—at the same moment."

A smile, sweet and peaceful, broke over Ethel's face.

"Walter," she said, "through all my life I have never done one action contrary to the light that is in me. That is a consolation to me now. Your coming has given me another joy. Promise to live and be a man, even if I die!"

"You shall not die!" he whispered, hastily, forgetting everything but his strong desire that she should not, and then he left her.

After that sudden gush of hope reaction came, and reaching home, he sat in gloomy silence, his chin sunken upon his breast, while the lawyer, also silent, knitted his brow in thought.

"This will not do," said Walter, starting up suddenly. "We must take means to rescue her."

"Break prison, eh?" said the lawyer, smiling in spite of himself at the young man's youthful enthusiasm. "I don't think we have enough money at our command for that, if it were advisable. The Montijeo property is contingent on the finding of the heiress and the amount and settlement on the nature of her education and social position; for instance, if she were— But that does not concern us at present. Enough that it is contingent. Yours—is it at your command?"

"No," said Walter; "but it can, it must, it shall be, every cent of it."

"It is at present entirely under your father's control?"

"Yes," replied Walter, hesitatingly, and feeling the full force of the suggestion. If his father, who was almost unacquainted with Ethel, believed her guilty, would he advance anything in such a cause? He felt, too surely, that that father would consider such a proposition a mere mad freak, unless convinced of the girl's innocence; and how was he to be convinced?

"Is it possible I am deceiving myself with false hopes? Is it possible that such a pure, noble being must die such a death?"

His emotion exhausted and silenced him.

"You must think of something more practicable than violence," said the lawyer, "but follow out your plan whatever it may be, only don't get yourself into trouble, and I, on my part, will do my best, if there is anything to do. It is possible there is some faint hope."

"Thank you for those words," said Walter, wringing the other's hand and then they parted for the night.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WALTER MERRITT'S EFFORTS.

FRAZER DODGE had, in giving a sort of slight encouragement to Walter Merritt, only considered the young man's frame of mind, and was, indeed, very anxious, dreading the overthrow of his reason. On his own part he was no more convinced of Ethel's innocence than before. His plan, however, was to act on the supposition that she was innocent; if, as he had said, there was anything to be done.

The execution of the awful sentence was fixed at four months' distance. Meanwhile, Walter visited Ethel once a week, and kept alive her hope, while he was failing fast.

"If," said the lawyer, some six or eight weeks after the trial, to Walter Merritt in one of their frequent consultations, "I say 'if' because it is the habit of my mind to doubt until I am satisfied. If, then, she is innocent, there is but one person who has a strong motive in throwing suspicion upon her. Yellow Jude has evidently, in some degree, been his tool; and Maria Bell had an opportunity, if it had been to her interest, to substitute the poison for medicine. One of those three, then, is undoubtedly the agent."

"L'Estrange's affairs must be looked into without his knowledge. Yellow Jude could be worked upon by bribery. As for Maria Bell, if she be the guilty one, she is a tough and most extraordinary customer. I have noted these facts as to L'Estrange. He suppressed his Christian name, and used another, in connection with the trial, for which he must have had some motive—the motive of hiding his identity from those familiar with the name, doubtless. He must, then, either have feared some facts in relation to his conduct being published, or the prisoner's identity coming to light; which, in the event of his being known, would make his having been a witness against her—indeed, all their former relations—appear very singular."

"Of course there are other interpretations, but I take the one which best suits my purpose. He was careful not to give evidence which might have brought out the heiress's name, as you remember."

"Again: some mysterious, unknown party was the means of procuring Ethel her position as nurse. L'Estrange was the only person who appears to have known where she went after leaving Mrs. Smith's. It seems scarcely likely that he should have followed her in her sudden flight; far more probable that he employed some one to watch her—some one who would be better able to follow a young woman through the streets unobserved; some one whose time was not taken up in elegant leisure. Who? That is the question."

"I don't see," said Walter, despondently, "any means of getting at such a question. Do you?"

"That remains to be seen," said the lawyer;

"meanwhile, what we want is facts. I have set a detective at work in the South to discover the state of L'Estrange's business affairs. Already I find he is largely in debt, not only in St. Augustine, which is his home, but in New Orleans, where he spent much of his time."

"I have written to Col. Montijeo, telling him that we have, at last, discovered the heiress, and in what a plight. He answers me in a heart-broken, rambling epistle."

"I stated the simple facts, with no comments; he has read them with the eyes of his own imagination. He says:

"That the daughter of my unfortunate son, Carlos, whose memory is most dear to me, should have gone astray into such a clouded pathway of crime, is a thought which tortures me with unutterable anguish, for in her proper home, at Montijeo, it could not have happened. I must save her to repentance, if possible; but here, again, duty restrains me. I must not impoverish my amiable and lovely wife for one whom I deeply commiserate, yet who has been guilty of a depth of ingratitude and crime that makes one shudder to contemplate."

"Though a most unworthy daughter of a noble boy, who had but one fault, which he inherited from his father—the fault of a rash temper—I would not have her, a woman, die so awful a death."

"The sins of fathers are, indeed, visited upon the children, even unto the fourth generation."

"If it be possible to procure another trial, let it be done by all means; and, in prosecuting inquiries, draw freely upon my purse, as it shall be needed."

"He thinks her guilty," said Walter, in great excitement. "Let me write to him. I will convince him of her innocence."

"Do so, by all means," said the lawyer. "It can do no harm. We may need his assistance yet. And now; there's a gentleman at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, a detective, you understand, name of Pierrepont, at present. You will remember, in case he communicates with you. He has taken a room adjoining Mr. L'Estrange's, and has already struck up an acquaintance. I will now see Maria Bell and try to find the reason of her misstatement to the prisoner—about John Sumner's mother, I mean—and you had better deal with Yellow Jude alone. I will take my turn afterward."

Walter Merritt took his way to Yellow Jude's home. The hour was dusk; and passing through a narrow and dirty alley, which led to the house, he came unexpectedly upon a well-dressed man. He carried a light cane, and on his bosom glittered three star-like diamonds.

"Pardon me," said this man, "do you know, in this neighborhood, a woman named Jane, a colored woman, who is a laundress, and does gentlemen's shirts very finely?"

"I do not," said Walter; and, in the same moment, he recognized in the stranger the man whom he had seen in the moonlight only once, who had offered his hand and fortune to Ethel on the doorstep of Mrs. Smith's lodging house. He was a person whose appearance, voice and manner were not easily forgotten.

Both passed on. Walter went on up the rickety stairs, and saw the man standing irresolute, in the alleyway, still.

The door of Jude's room stood ajar. She was bending over her stove, stewing something in a pan.

As she heard the click of the latch, she looked over her shoulder, and said, quite angrily:

"I tells ye I burnt 'em all. Couldn't gib you one on 'em ef I wanted to."

"Burnt what, Jude?"

"Why dose 'ere red—"

Here she turned square around, startled evidently by seeing another person than she expected. Instantly she thrust a chair toward her visitor.

"Was jes' speakin' to de gemman 'bout his shirts," said she. "Must 'scuse me bein' here in de dark. Poor Jude hasn't got any money to buy candles wid."

"I'll give you money for all the candles you want," said her visitor, "but I want a little talk with you."

"I hopes you ain't arter dat ar gemman, Mr. L'Estrange, or something. Anything else, I should be mos' happy to oblige white folks, but dat ar gemman he done gone cl'ar away. Ain't neber seen him since."

"No, Jude, I've come to tell you something," said Walter Merritt.

Jude lighted a tallow-candle, showing that she possessed one at least, set it down upon the table, and drew another of her rickety chairs in unpleasant proximity to her visitor.

"Jude," said the latter, "you took care of Ethel when she was a very little child, and you were fond of your old master, were you not? and of her father?"

"Yes," said Jude, "I was mighty proud ob de ole colonel and all ob 'em."

"Do you know where she is now?"

"No, swar to Simon, I don't."

"I can tell you, Jude; she is in prison, accused of murder."

Jude rocked herself to and fro in her surprise and astonishment.

"De ole colonel's granddaughter! Oh, Lorse! oh, Lorse!" She went on with unmeaning ejaculations and noises for a while, and then asked a question which seemed to her very pertinent.

"Did she hab probocation? Bekase if she did, dey'll let her go."

"It's a mistake, Jude, but they think she did it. If you could help clear her you would?"

"Suah! guess I would. Ole colonel's granddaughter! White folks!—jes' think ob it!"

"You can help me save her," said Walter, rejoiced that he had succeeded in arousing some display of feeling.

"What'll you gub me?" said Yellow Jude, eagerly.

"Give you? Hundreds of dollars, anything, if you tell me what I want to know."

"In the first place, what did Oscar L'Estrange go to your house in St. Augustine for, just after Pedro told Colonel Montijeo about his granddaughter?"

Yellow Jude arose, went and peeped out of the door as if to assure herself that no one was listening, closed it carefully and sat down again, her face assuming an expression of crafty meditation.

"Jes' to ask me where she war," she said, speaking slowly and carefully, as if picking her words.

"Did he ask you to come North?"

"No. I came Norf becase I was so drettle poor, and I thunk dat ar Miss Raymond might gub me something."

"How did he find you?"

"He didn't found me—" began the woman; then seeing a stern look creeping over Walter's face, she changed her answer.

"Well—I went to his hotel. He tole me whar he war goin' to stop."

"And then?"

"Well, then, ole colonel's granddaughter was a-workin' for her libin', and Massa Oscar he was in lub wid 'er, and he paid me to watch ober her."

"Jude," said Walter, harshly and impatiently, "did he tell you this?"

"Tell me? Lord lub you, don't I know the signs. But he tole me: yes, he did, and I used to get money from boff on 'em—a little, I mean."

"You watched her?"

"Until she done gone away from — street, den—not until you jes' tole me did I know a word about her."

"Jude, will you swear this? Swear that you know nothing of her being accused of murder, nothing of any poison? What did he—Oscar L'Estrange, come here for to-night?"

"Lord lub you—how fast ye talk," said Jude. "Know 'bout ole colonel's granddarter being 'cused? Told ye I didn't. Swar to gracious Massa Oscar ain't been near me."

"Jude, I know that he has."

"No; oh, no. Can't know nothin ob de kind becase he ain't. That was dat ar Mr. Brown came arter some shirts."

"What shall I give you to tell the truth, Jude?"

"Wouldn't tell it for no 'mount of money. He ain't been here!"

Jude grew uneasy here, rolling her eyes in perplexity, fidgeting, as if longing to escape.

"I tell you what I'll do, young gemman," she whispered, getting much closer than before to her interrogator. "I'll visit you at your own place. Is dat gemman lawyer what wisitated me 'round?"

"At my place? Yes," said Walter, catching at her idea. "Come and see us. We will make it worth your while to tell us all you know. Remember that, whatever anybody else may offer. You show that card to any one, and they will tell you where to find us, in — street."

He put something else in her hand at the same time and left, she whispering after him: "I'll be dar day after to-morrow, in de ebenin'."

"Impracticable creature!" he ejaculated as he stood outside, on the rickety platform, and a strong and very disagreeable doubt that the woman was deluding him with a false promise crept into his mind.

Then he found his way out into the open

streets, a perilous journey down those rickety steps and the narrow alley, then through another yard with a trickling hydrant and tub full of water directly in his path. As he turned into this yard, he saw the man whom he had before passed, steal out of the alley-way and go toward the stairs that led to Jude's perch.

He was half-minded to go thither and confront him and the lying woman together, but a moment's reflection taught him the folly of such a proceeding; strategy was the only available weapon with which Ethel's prison door could be reached. He went on to the lawyer's home through the darkness of the foggy night, a terrible gloom settling down upon his heart.

CHAPTER XXV.

FRAZER DODGE BECOMES OFFENSIVE.

FINDING the lawyer at home, Walter related his day's experience, both men seated before the evening fire, the younger one in a state of deep depression, the other imperturbable as usual.

When he reached the part of his conversation where he had spoken to Yellow Jude of their suspicions and of the poison, the lawyer broke in:

"That was imprudent," said he. "I shouldn't have done that. We do not want to put L'Estrange on his guard."

"I see," said Walter, and it seemed as if a leaden weight had been added to the heaviness of his heart. "I'm a blunderer, a fool, an idiot!"

"Tut, tut," said the other. "We shall have to be more vigilant, more active, that is all. There seem to be some grounds to work on now. L'Estrange has nearly ruined himself. He is gambling to such an extent, an old hand, Pierpont tells me. Yellow Jude once secured, I think we might work a case of some kind. Of course it is very doubtful that she will keep her word, but if she should we must both be at the office to meet her. In the evening, the day after to-morrow."

"Merritt," said the lawyer, after a slight pause, "I want to ask you a question."

Walter looked up, expecting to hear something in regard to the subject in hand which was their staple conversation. He was much surprised when the lawyer said, very gravely:

"Am I bad-looking man?"

He hesitated before answering.

"Speak out," said the other, "you know I asked you the question, and I can't be offended."

"A very good-looking one," said Walter, feeling, in spite of himself, a strong sense of anger toward a man who could dwell on trivialities at such a time. This man of all others who professed friendship for him.

"To speak plainly," said Frazer Dodge, "do you think any woman could fancy me?"

"Yes," said Walter, "a cultivated woman might be very apt to, I should think. Is there one on hand?"

"Hum!" said his questioner, but half satisfied apparently, and disregarding the question. "I don't particularly admire very cultivated women, but is my appearance stiff, awkward, unprepossessing, likely to frighten a pretty young girl, should you think?"

"By no means," said Walter; "but excuse me, Mr. Dodge, I am very much fatigued and—dispirited."

He hurried away, took his hat and went out into the streets. His irritation against the lawyer was such that he could not endure to sit opposite him longer. That any one should be thinking of his own affairs, this man of all others, thinking of anything but the one awful horror that was always before his eyes, driving him further away from hope and happiness, was beyond his comprehension.

The night was late and rainy, but he walked on and on, unheeding the heavy fog, the dampness, the cold raindrops, the ghastly horror before him, the burden of trouble upon his heart weighing it down, down.

When at last he felt that solitude was too much for him, that he must fly from himself if he wished to keep his reason, he went, not to the lawyer's house, but home, and there remained a day and night.

The next morning he went to the lawyer's office ready for work. His mood of deep depression was over, and nothing seemed endurable but activity.

Pedro was in the office, deep in his law-book, for he was studying law with a good will.

To Walter's questions in regard to the lawyer, he answered that he had not been at the office the day previous. Walter next went to his private residence. There a servant informed him that Mr. Dodge had not slept at home.

Back to the office. There Walter waited, receiving such visitors as came, chafing at the

lawyer's delay, execrating the folly that had kept him from the man whom circumstance, at least, had made a friend in need.

At dusk he went out, forgetting that he had eaten nothing since early morning, took a turn through the streets, returned, expecting to find Frazer Dodge, for it was nearing the hour when Jude would probably reach the place, if, indeed, she intended keeping her word.

He was not there, however, and Pedro was preparing to lock up.

"Leave the keys with me, Pedro," said Walter. "I expect Mr. Dodge this evening."

"Indeed!" said Pedro, and left with a "good-evening."

Walter waited, but the lawyer did not come, waited till the city bells rung nine and Yellow Jude did not make her appearance, waited on with a thousand doubts and fears thronging on his mind until long past midnight, and then fell asleep and woke from one fearful dream after another all through the night.

In one of the terrible visions he had just rushed into the midst of a fierce, struggling crowd, to see an executioner with uplifted ax standing above Ethel, heard the sharp, quick blows descend, when he looked up to find that it was broad daylight and Pedro had entered.

The door had been open all night.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN ACTOR IS REMOVED FROM THE STAGE.

GOING out into the open air, Walter Merritt felt the weakness consequent upon a day's fasting, and was about to seek refreshment, for his very work's sake, when a boy ran against him.

This boy was stupidly staring, and carried a huge book in his hand.

"Kin you tell me," said he, stammering, and looking straight at the number over the office door, with eyes that had no manner of speculation in them, "kin you tell me where Mr. Dodge's office is?"

Then Walter Merritt discovered that this was a boy pertaining to the nearest telegraph office, and snatched at the paper he held, in trembling haste.

"Please to sign yer name," said the boy; and having complied, Walter read only these words, addressed to himself:

"Please meet me at Saranac's Restaurant, corner of — street.—Pierpont."

His face brightened. This meant something. The lawyer's absence from his home and his place of business would be explained in some satisfactory way. The restaurant was in a very unpleasant locality, but it never entered Walter's mind that there could be anything wrong about the message, and a very healthy hunger quickened his footsteps on the way.

He found closed doors when he reached the place to which he had been directed, but a little examination proved that access was easy. A half-grown boy stood within the vestibule of the room, which was a long hall, somewhat handsomely furnished, and supplied with card tables, all surrounded with players.

"You want to see Mr. Pierpont, don't you?" said the boy.

Walter answered in the affirmative, and was told to wait a few moments. Presently a man came out and conducted him through the long room into another smaller one, where several small tables stood. Many of the men looked up from their cards as the two passed. One or two gave Walter's conductor a wink, or a curious look, which seemed to imply some secret and rather ludicrous understanding between them. This Walter attributed to the fame of the detective—for Pierpont was well known in that capacity.

"Coffee for two," said this man, to a waiter who came for his order. "Coffee; and what'll you have, Mr. Merritt? Say a good porter-house steak."

Walter assented, eagerly.

"I have the pleasure of meeting Mr. Pierpont for the first time," said he; and then, for the first time, he took a look at the famous detective.

Famous he might be, and skillful, but he certainly wore a most bungling and awkward disguise at the present moment. Eyebrows, wig and mustaches were glaringly false, and unsuited to the face they disfigured.

"The same," said the other, bowing, and smiling, politely.

"I shall frighten you by my voracity," said Walter. "I was rather busy and—excited—yesterday; and absolutely forgot to eat."

The detective laughed vociferously—extravagantly. He was certainly as different as pos-

sible from his guest's preconceived idea of a detective.

Walter ate and drank with a zest. The coffee was extremely good. On being pressed, he consented to take another cup, and another. His host related an anecdote—the remarks he exploited of some burglars—which, as yet, had not appeared in print. He began to wonder when he would come to the object of the interview; but, having great faith in the shrewdness of a person chosen by Frazer Dodge, for such important service, concluded there was some good object in all this circumlocution.

He ventured, however, to ask one question:

"You have seen Mr. Dodge, recently?"

"Oh, certainly," said the other, smiling; "are in constant communication."

And just then a dizziness seized upon Walter, and, as if by a sudden inspiration, he saw the trap he had been lured into. In an instant all the consequences of his death at such a moment flashed into his mind.

It must be death, this horror that was creeping over him. And where was Frazer Dodge? Had such another trap been set for him?

Walter staggered to his feet, and called out, in as steady and loud a voice as he could master:

"This man has poisoned me," then fell to the ground—and with him fell whatever clues of knowledge he had gathered from Yellow Jude's half-finished confession.

When he recovered consciousness he found himself in a large, bare room, on a lounge covered with faded green satin. There was no other object visible. The long floor was bare; the windows barred with iron bars, curiously riveted into the wall; and the only light that entered came through a tiny slit in the top of one of the thick wooden shutters. The room had two doors—both of which were, as he soon ascertained, securely fastened on the outside.

Presently he discovered one other object. In the corner, behind the chimney-jamb, was a dumb-waiter—not of ordinary construction—a small triangular shelf, walled in with bricks; and while he looked at it, it was suddenly drawn down. It reappeared in a few moments, bearing a substantial meal upon it—chicken pot-pie, rolls, coffee and dessert.

Being, again, furiously hungry, he carried these treasures to the lounge, and, having first ascertained that there was no possibility of escape by door or window, determined to eat and drink. He was suspicious about the coffee, and smelled and tasted it with caution, but its aroma appealed too strongly to his senses to be resisted.

The meal produced no ill-effects, however, but the contrary. With care he replaced the dishes on the waiter, keeping the small table-knife which had accompanied them as a possible instrument of release. So fortified by the late repast, he gained courage to examine his situation. He tried the solid doors. There was no open chimney, not even a stove-pipe hole that he could ascertain, no register or other inlet or outlet. The walls of the dumb-waiter were not large enough even to admit two feet. The windows were fastened with iron bars welded into other iron buried deep in the solid masonry of the walls. Through the one small cleft a ray of sunlight shone, and that was the only communication from the outside world.

The day waned, night fell, after a time a silver ray of moonlight shot through the narrow aperture.

A natural sleep fell upon the prisoner's eyelids.

He awoke to find a meal awaiting him. There was, besides, a slip of paper on which was written:

"The gentleman will please use the knife he had yesterday and send it down to be washed."

With the first part of this request Walter was obliged to comply, the second, however, he declined. The written slip had suggested a thought. He revolved the thought, while eating, and, after having finished, put it into execution. His note-book, pencil, etcetera, were still in his pocket. He took a sheet of paper and wrote several times:

"I have been drugged and imprisoned in this house. You will see the room in which I am if you look for a white paper sticking out at the top of the shutter."

To these, or nearly similar words, he added his name and his father's residence, and the assurance of a reward, and spent his time until the next meal, slipping them out of the small slit in the shutter. The table-knife he found convenient, for it was necessary to break a pane of the window to reach his novel post-

box, the sashes being secured with screws and other contrivances.

After each venture, he rolled a sheet of paper which he had taken for the purpose into a cone shape and protruded it from the window, holding on by the iron bars, meanwhile, and listening eagerly for such sounds as might rise above the hum of the city. He judged that the room was several stories, perhaps four or five, from the ground, for the rolling of wheels, the murmur of many voices seemed all mingled in one uproar, and there was nothing to be seen but the blue sky.

To put his eye close to the shutter he must have destroyed the window-sash, which would be a work of time, he having only a table-knife and a pen-knife to work with.

Having exhausted his messages long before the day was over, he wrote a few more, then, having found a newspaper of the largest dimensions in his pockets, he tore it into long, narrow strips, attached the small slips of paper to them by ingenious paper-hooks and sent them flying.

These producing no results, as far as he knew, he concluded to save some of his stock of materials for another day and use them only after meditation.

The light waned and no result of his day's work had yet appeared. With restless feet he paced the long, bare floor, hour after hour, until at length he dropped down on the lounge, utterly prostrated. Sleep was slow in coming even then, but at last he slumbered.

When he next awoke all was darkness. By his own calculation it should have been moonlight until the dawn, but neither sun nor moon sent a ray into his prison. After a long lapse of time and much groping through the darkness, he discovered that the place was the same in which he had fallen asleep. Days passed without any event, so many that the weary man was confused as to their number. By degrees he gained the power to see clearly in the deep gloom. He discovered that the small slit in the shutter had been closed across with iron. His food came regularly in the fashion of the first day, but the close, unventilated room, his agitation of mind and want of exercise robbed him entirely of his appetite. It was only by the most strenuous efforts that he could force himself to eat enough to support life.

His next attempt was at the wooden shutter itself. Day after day he scraped away at it with the table-knife and pen-knife alternately in the same spot, having carefully broken away every particle of glass in the lower panes of the window. He worked with perfect security for he was never disturbed from without. There was no sign of any one being aware of his existence except the constant supply of food. But it was slow work, for the wood of which the shutter was made seemed as hard as stone.

His plan was to carve the inner surface of the board, leaving the outside untouched until the last moment, when he would break through it with one blow and reveal his condition to some passer-by, giving his jailers no time or opportunity to frustrate his task a second time.

Perhaps the concentration of his mind on this one real object, was the only thing that saved its sanity. Even in the midst of this tedious labor, features of all the dreadful possibilities that fate might yet have in store rose before his imagination, but there was enough hope in his task to enable him to live.

There had been but one event in a long host of weary days. Once the sound of a pistol-shot had startled him, then, apparently in the building where he was imprisoned, far down below him, but distinctly audible, there had been a sound of hurrying feet and voices in alarm, shouting, exclaiming in horror, then dead silence within and the murmur of the street without, muffled as it was by the solid barriers.

At last there came a day when his usual supply of food did not appear. He hardly missed it, but worked on. There was now only a paper-thin partition between him and the outer world. During the last hours of this day he took a few restless runs through the room to rest his aching hand and prepare himself for a new effort when, in a careless way, not in the least expecting any result, he turned the lock of one of the doors as he had done a hundred times before, but, not as before did it resist his touch. It yielded and he found himself released from the place where he had been, he was afraid to think how many days.

The first burst of light, for he had entered an open hall around a well-lighted stair-case with a window above and three at one side of it, dazzled and nearly stunned him so that he clung reeling to the door-post. When he was able to look around him, he went tottering to the stair-

case as though he had been a feeble old man, and leaned over the railing.

There was no sound below that he could distinguish. The three windows at the side of the stair-case looked out upon the street through which Walter Merritt had entered his prison. He recognized the spot and knew that this was the house he had entered.

He went feebly down the stairs, staggering, and found that the whole building was empty of occupants and furniture. There was, here and there, a shred of carpet that had apparently resisted some hasty pull, and one or two articles which had evidently been left behind by neglect, or, perhaps, through want of time to remove them. A handsome bracket or two, a clock fastened by screws to the wall, and a few other such objects.

He found his way to the apartment where he had eaten breakfast with the pretended Pierrepont. The green baize doors swung loosely open at his touch. There was no sign of any living creature, save a few curious spiders that had precipitated themselves into the barrenness, and were apparently meditating on the locality most favorable for the allurement of luckless flies.

The way was open. Through the long room where the card-tables had been but were no more, through the vestibule where the boy had stood guard, into the open street. Walter Merritt was free.

Free, but what might have passed?

At another time, Walter would doubtless have had some curiosity about the event which had befallen him, but now only one thought filled his mind. What had become of Ethel? He went his way to the lawyer's office first.

It was in a large building, accessible at any hour of the day. The door of the office itself was fastened, but the key he found in a hiding-place under the sill, where they had been in the habit of placing it when it was necessary that all three should be absent and uncertain which would return first.

He opened the door and entered, took a seat in the revolving-chair which stood before the lawyer's desk, raised his eyes and saw on the cylindrical calendar that stood upon the desk, a day indicated—the fatal day!

CHAPTER XXVI.

A FLIRTATION.

It may not prove a digression to follow Maria Bell into her new home for a short time.

After Mr. Sheridan's death, his three servants dispersed, and Maria Bell and John Sumner, by a tacit agreement remained unsuited, until a chambermaid and coachman were wanted at the same place.

John Sumner was a slow man generally—slow in his motions—slow in his locomotions, and extremely slow in coming to the point, and Maria Bell, who was quite willing to become Mrs. Sumner, and devote herself to him for the rest of her life, felt this to be the case.

It may have been that Ethel's mortal peril had strongly affected Maria Bell's spirits; such a state of things would seem to be but natural. It might have been, also, that she was less willing than able to throw off the unpleasant and depressing train of thoughts that peril occasioned. However this might have been, John Sumner was obliged, out of common humanity, to spend all his leisure time in comforting the dejected girl, and was only too happy, if by dint of soothing words and coaxing embraces he at last succeeded in winning a single smile ever so meager and wan.

At the end of the final trial, however, it was plain to see that Maria was utterly prostrated with grief. Her pretty blue eyes caught a scared, fear-stricken look they did not lose for months after. She would sit and brood for hours, looking into vacancy as if it were peopled with fearful shapes, starting wildly at the least unusual sound, lapsing sometimes into weak hysterics.

These lapses became less frequent as time wore on and her natural light-heartedness became in a measure restored, though not entirely. The least mention of Ethel would drive her into the wildest paroxysms.

About two months after the passing of the sentence, she was leaning upon the area gate in the early evening. Inside the basement room John Sumner, tilted back in a chair to the peril of its frail anatomy, leisurely discussed his evening pipe, while the kitchen-girl and cook commented on the topics of the day in a lively and sportive manner, calculated to attract his attention, as they removed the supper dishes.

When John Sumner had well finished his

smoke, lowered the front legs of his chair, swarmed to the mantel-piece, knocked the ashes behind the fender, replaced the pipe in its box, and the box on the mantel-shelf, he walked out to Maria Bell, who had worked herself into a state of pout, and was also somewhat uncomfortable in the chilly spring air without an extra wrap.

The kitchen-girl and cook nudged each other and indulged in satirical remarks on the inclemency of the weather, Maria Bell's delicate constitution, and John Sumner's want of sociability; but if he heard the sneering laugh that followed him, he offered no remark except to his own ears.

"Let 'em laugh," inwardly commenting on the fact that he should please himself best by following his own inclinations and his fast-souring sweetheart.

The girl looked over her shoulder for the minutest part of a second, and then resumed her fixed gaze down the street, where there was at that moment no object of interest to be seen. John Sumner leaned his elbows on the area-railing, standing, in consequence, in a rather awkward position, and put his face close to hers, looking at her quite placidly under his bushy eyebrows.

"Well," said she, snappishly, "what is it?"

"I want to speak to you, Mariar."

"Well," said she again, "why don't you speak? I'm going in."

"Oh, well," said the other, slowly, "I suppose it will keep."

This was not exactly what the girl wished or expected. She turned as if to fulfill her threat, and then came back in a careless way, very well acted.

"Well, what did you want to say, John?" said she.

"You're sure you're not in a hurry?"

"No," she said, laughing.

"Well, then, let us be comfortable."

John Sumner sat down on the stone steps, and Maria Bell was fain to do the same, perching just above him on the flag-stones of the area. After her first false step she was more cautious, and didn't even hint at the coldness of the weather, for John's words, if slow in coming, were generally acceptable, and worth waiting for, and might prove more so.

After perhaps five minutes, he said:

"Mr. Byng's gone and got a new coachman."

"Instead of you!" almost screamed Maria Bell.

"No; along of me."

"I'd like to know what for!"

"Well," said John, meditatively, "I suppose he wanted one, and I suppose he had the money to pay him."

After another profound meditation, John Sumner added:

"The family is large."

"I wonder if he's nice," said Maria, coquettishly.

"I don't want you to be sweet on him," said John.

"Why not?"

It was a splendid opportunity for a man who wanted one. Why not? A hundred reasons might have poured from an ardent lover's lips, but all John Sumner said was:

"I don't."

"But why?"

"Just because I don't. There!"

Maria flounced into the house, aggravated beyond all patience, and just in time to encounter the new coachman, a man of striking appearance certainly. His head was covered with a crown of shining black curls, the small mustache on his upper lip was jetty, and his cheeks a vivid crimson; his eyes, too, sparkled like jewels, and set all her pulses beating with a new sense of pleasure.

Here was sport ahead. John Sumner might perhaps find a better reason why, or, perhaps, might never have the chance to give it again.

A bashful silence had fallen upon the kitchen. The cook was the least awkward of the three, being occupied with peeling potatoes. The kitchen-girl, christened Theresa and named "Tess" by her contemporaries, seemed painfully conscious of her hands and feet and ready to sink into the hearth. The new coachman hummed and bahad, crossed and re-crossed his knees, looked meditatively at the fire, the ceiling, the furniture, and the inmates of the room alternately.

Maria Bell was, at first, impressed by the awful and unpleasant solemnity of the occasion, but had enough self-possession to fall into a pretty and graceful attitude, leaning against the high window-sill, with her slippers crossed and looking modestly and sweetly askance at

the new arrival, who presently and with much apparent difficulty dragged up from his mental depths this profound speech, interrupted by much coughing and clearing of his throat, as if the words had rasped it in the passage:

"I say—ahem!—ladies—it's—a—ahem! it's pleasant weather—I say."

"Yes, sir," said the cook.

"Real pleasant," said Maria Bell, smiling archly.

"Yes," said Tess, feebly and almost inaudibly, coming in like the losing horse in a race.

"It was nice weather yesterday," ventured the cook.

"Yes," said Tess, timidly, struggling between her bashfulness and her desire to take part in the conversation.

"Very, indeed," said the new coachman. "I should hope this fine weather would continue."

"Oh, yes," said the cook and Tess in concert.

It was reserved for Maria Bell to make the next original remark.

"You didn't tell us your name yet," said she, with a giggle.

"Quite correct," said the new coachman; "my name is John Anderson."

This produced a general laugh.

"Why, that's the other coach-gentleman's name—John!" said the cook, and just then John Sumner made his appearance at the door. He was not a very animated object, but, without alarming any one by his speed, he managed to get through the kitchen and retire to his sleeping apartment, while the conversation below waxed livelier and became, with a few faint protests from "cook," a conversation between Maria Bell and John Anderson.

It was by no means the last in which the two were engaged. John Sumner was destined to feel the pangs of unrequited love, the which he bore at first with a solemn dignity, which passed for sulks.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AN UNDERSTANDING.

FOR two or three weeks things went on smoothly in Mr. Byng's kitchen. A very deceptive smoothness it was and likely to come to some unpleasant end. Maria Bell's too evident delight in an enjoyment of John Anderson's society, at first directed at John Sumner, seemed to be becoming very genuine, but John Anderson, free with his gifts, lavish in purchase of theater tickets, making Maria's life, for the time being, a gala day, was quite as tantalizing as John Sumner when it came to the real point.

His compliments were of the indirect order. For instance, he would say that blue was extremely becoming to her complexion, which he might have said with equal veracity to cook or Tess, but then he accompanied such speeches with a twinkle of rapture in his eyes, which was very convincing until the moment of sober reflection.

At length John Sumner, having by slow and sure degrees worked himself to such a state of sulks that he seemed liable, being naturally a round-shouldered man, to run entirely to shoulders, resolved on prompt action, and having eyed his rival in stern silence for two days, suddenly crooked his thumb toward the unconscious criminal, and said, in sepulchral tones:

"You comerlong," leading the way to the carriage-house.

John Anderson was a slightly-made man, and when Sumner had hooked a button-hole with his little finger and planted a huge hand on his shoulder, it seemed a possible feat for the big man to have crushed the other. He only said, however, in a deep and impressive voice:

"Now then. She's my gal."

The other rubbed his delicate hands with a relish for what was coming, evidently quite ready to throw off his coat and pitch in. Cook and Tess, who had stolen into the garden, to peep through into the carriage way, shivered and clutched each other's hands in terror.

"Ain't he splendid," said Tess, giving no indication whom she meant.

It was night and Maria Bell was not on the scene, only because she was employed above stairs.

"And welcome," was Anderson's unexpected reply, not audible, however, to the two women, who could only see, not hear what was taking place.

"Eh!" said the other, apparently stunned.

"I say you're welcome to her."

"You do, eh? Then why do you go taking her to thee-ayters and things?"

"How was I to know she was your girl?" said the other.

"How?" began Sumner, blustering. "Eh?"

ies"—scratching his head, and breaking down in his proposed speech.

"Yes, I see. She didn't tell you, then?"

"No," said Anderson. "She didn't. But I wouldn't come between you, if you wanted her for a wife."

"Well, I do."

"But," said Anderson, hesitating in his turn. "I—I—"

"You what?" said Sumner, much mollified and ready to listen to anything reasonable.

"The fact is—I don't want her," said Anderson, "but she seems to have taken a fancy to me. Now I have a proposition to make. You may not like it. You may think it's a queer one, but it's an idea of my own."

"Speak out."

"In the first place this is a free country."

"I suppose it is," said Sumner, gloomily.

"You couldn't make the girl have you if she didn't want you."

"Who says she don't?"

"Nobody. But you own you couldn't. Now don't you?"

"Well, yes," was the unwilling answer.

"Well, she really has taken a little fancy to me. You know girls change their minds easy."

"I know they do," replied the forsaken John, with pathos and meaning.

"And you've got to—as it were—wean her back to you."

"Darned if I will!"

"Now," said John, the successful, taking no notice of the interruption, "there's a young woman in this place that thinks a wonderful deal of you."

"Cook?" questioned John Sumner, chuckling with infantile rapture.

"No—Tess. Now my idea is that you reward Tess with a little of your attention. Buy her some candies, a ribbon or so. No harm in that. Take her to church or a play—"

"I'd better have spent my money on Maria."

"Yes," said the schemer, "but you see you didn't. Now, as I was saying. In a week or two, your Maria will see that she's lost something. If she don't, I'll—"

"You'll what?" asked John Sumner.

"I'll take myself off."

"On your honor?"

"On my honor as a gentleman. There. But in the meantime—I'll let her down easy."

"You'll—"

"I'll leave off—gradually."

"You ain't a-tricking me?"

"Not I! There's my hand on it," and the two Johns shook hands and parted without further hostilities, much to the surprise of the watchers.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AN IMPORTANT QUESTION.

"I WANT to ask you an important question," said John Anderson softly to Maria Bell, "but first will you tell me something?"

Maria Bell blushed brightly and her heart began to thump. "An important question!" there was only one she could think of. Must she make up her mind in such a hurry after all? She had been three weeks expecting it and now it had come she was no surer than before that she had quite done with John Sumner.

But John Anderson did not give her time for reflection.

"Do you know where I first saw you?" he said, and his look added: "and loved you at first sight," though his tongue certainly did not.

"No," said Maria. "Where?"

"At that trial. Where you were witness."

The girl clapped her hands over her ears and gave a short hysterical cry.

"Don't speak of it," she said, "I can't bear to think of it. It frightens me!"

"But that's just what I want to speak of," said John Anderson. "I couldn't ask you that—that important question, if I didn't know what I want to know first."

"Well," said Maria, "I'll tell you. But don't talk much about it."

"I won't," said the coachman, "but I took a fancy then that you—"

He stopped here for Maria Bell had turned a livid white and was trembling violently.

"Don't. Don't," she whispered.

"Yes," said John Anderson, "I must. You ought to see that I have a right to ask—"

"You don't mean—?"

"Yes, I do. I mean did you kill—"

Maria Bell uttered a sharp cry, then clapped her hand on her mouth.

"Of course—of course I didn't, but I did do something and I don't think it could have done any harm. I'm so glad to tell somebody. If

you'll promise never to get me into trouble. I'm sure you wouldn't want to see me hung."

"You won't get into any trouble," said the other, "but now tell me"—he drew from a vest-pocket a small white paper and unfolded it before her eyes—"did you ever see any stuff like this?"

"Oh, throw it away, throw it away!" cried Maria Bell. "What did you get that for?"

Then she suddenly blushed a fiery red, big tears sprung to her eyes, and she buried her face in her hands.

"Now, Maria, tell me all about it. As you know I wouldn't have you hurt for the world. Didn't you put something like this in the cabinet?"

"Yes, I did," with a desperate effort.

"And the gentleman who was making love to you, Mr. L'Estrange—"

"He wasn't. He wasn't! He liked her. That was what it was for. He wanted to make her like him."

"By giving her poison, or killing Mr. Sheridan, or how?" asked John Anderson.

"It was for her. Oh, dear! I don't know what I shall do! He told me to empty one of the papers—on—the—lower shelf," said Maria Bell, sobbing between her words, "and there wasn't any on the lowest—shelf and—I put it in the—other and I don't know which is which—but I've been so frightened—for fear—it—was—the wrong one—that it wasn't—"

"Well you might be!" said John Anderson, gravely. "You mean to let an innocent woman go to the gallows through your act?"

"But they'll hang me. You promised not to tell. I don't want to be hung," sobbed Maria.

"I'm—too—young."

"So is she," said the other, dryly. "But there's not the least danger. You supposed it was, in fact, what is called a love-powder?"

"Yes," said Maria Bell.

"And Oscar L'Estrange represented that she was to have it, not Mr. Sheridan?"

"Yes. Oh, yes. How did you come to know all about it?"

"That's my own affair. Did he give it to you or did you get it yourself?"

"That's the queerest part of it. I got it from an old black witch," answered Maria, as meekly as a little child answers its catechism.

"I went down—street, and stood at a door and somebody came out and asked me if I wanted to see the witch. Then my eyes were blindfolded and I was taken somewhere, I don't know where, and when I opened them, I saw the black witch all wrapped up in a black cloak, and she asked me what I wanted, and says I, 'A love-powder.'

"Says she 'Red or white?' and I says, 'Red.'"

"How did you know what to say?"

"He told me before what she would say. Then I was blindfolded again and taken to the street."

"Well," said John Anderson, "I'm obliged to you for telling me. I'll say good-night now."

"I suppose you'll never ask me that question now?" said Maria Bell, with downcast eyes.

"Oh, yes," said John Anderson, blandly unconscious of what might lie behind the question. "I did ask you—about the poison, you know, Maria."

The next day Mr. Byng boasted of only one coachman, and seemed not in the least astonished that John Anderson, true to his promise, had taken himself off out of the reach of Maria Bell's fascinations forevermore.

CHAPTER XXX.

UNMASKED.

ABOUT three weeks after Walter Merritt's sudden disappearance, John Anderson entered lawyer Dodge's office, where Pedro sat, deep in study.

Pedro looked up in dismay at his free and easy carriage, for he flung himself into the office chair with a sigh of relief.

"I say, Pedro, don't you ever speak of this," he said.

"And I say," said Pedro, with reasonable indignation, "what do you mean by walking in here and making yourself at home without asking leave?"

John Anderson gave a tug at his curly locks, which responded by coming off in his hands, another at his mustache, which also yielded, and the tell-tale crimson was all that remained of the lawyer's disguise.

"You see, Pedro," he said, apologetically, "I had to get something out of an ignorant, foolish girl—something that she was afraid to tell, and I had to worm myself into her confidence. I know it's disgusting, but I could not trust the

work to any detective I could find. I'm afraid Pierrepont will make a mess of the job I gave him, every day.

"Now, Pedro, like a good boy, get me a decent black vest. And by the way," said the lawyer, "how is Merritt getting on?"

"I haven't the least idea, sir," said Pedro.

The lawyer stopped short in peeling off the crimson vest which had graced him as John Anderson.

"Hasn't he been here?" he asked.

"The day you left," said Pedro, "or, rather, the day after, Mr. Merritt came in just about dusk. I was going to give him your message, but he said he expected you; so I supposed you had changed your mind. He stayed here all that night. The next morning he was going out when a telegram came—I have it somewhere. Yes—here."

The lawyer read the words which had entrapped Walter.

"Phew!" said he, "there's something wrong. This never came from Pierrepont. The idea is absurd. Saranac's restaurant. And Merritt went out to answer this?"

"Yes, sir."

"And has not since returned?"

"No."

"Shall we never come to the end of our troubles?" said Lawyer Dodge, with a profound sigh.

"If there is devilry about this, and I haven't a doubt of it, I will make them pay for it. Why, it would only take such a thing as I suspect to put him off his balance entirely. Such a noble young fellow! I'm not romantic; I'm not in the least heroic, but I do think I'd give my life for him, if that were in any way practicable. Yes, I believe I would."

"I must search this thing out directly. I see everything here is in apple-pie order," he added, turning over some of the files of papers on the desk.

"Just such a place as I expected," said he, as he paused before Saranac's restaurant. "I guess Pierrepont's hints will be of use to me here."

He gave a very peculiar signal at the outer door, and instantly a young man appeared—the same whom Walter had met on his entrance.

"Is Pierrepont or L'Estrange here?" asked he.

The young man nodded in the affirmative, and the lawyer noticed that his face was white, as if with a sudden fright.

"Something has happened in there," he said, "but I suppose you can go in," and he let lawyer Dodge pass.

Something had, indeed, happened. The men in the long room had started up from their card-tables, others were hurrying toward the inner room, dismay and anxiety were in every face, and in the midst of a frightened crowd, a pistol fallen from his outstretched hand, lay Oscar L'Estrange. Frazer Dodge could hardly believe his eyes, but taken by surprise as he was, his presence of mind did not desert him. He saw plainly that death was inevitable. The villain had taken his own life with his own hand.

"Take your staring eyes away, all of you," murmured the dying man. "I'm as good as dead, and I am glad of it. Keep the money, and may it be a curse to you—every dollar of it."

"Oscar L'Estrange," said the lawyer, "you are dying! Will you say a word now that may atone for the wrong you have done? Will you not save the life you tried to destroy by poison? I have come in time for your confession."

"No!" said the man, with a terrible scowl of pain and hatred. "Why should she live? I hate her. Why should any one live if I could not? I wanted to live and be happy—that was all, and I have lost my last cent and more. Why should she live to give all to another man?"

A doctor, who had been sent for, came in now, and knelt beside Oscar L'Estrange.

"Fatal!" he said, decidedly. "He cannot live many hours."

A carriage was at the door, and the wounded man was taken to it, and borne to the hotel where he had been staying, and where he died shortly after, obstinately defiant, obstinately silent.

His papers and private belongings being examined, disclosed the fact that he had exhausted his last resource. Debt was heaped upon debt, and even the loss at the gaming-table, which was the direct impetus of his suicidal act, was of money borrowed on false pretenses.

Among other things, the photograph of a sweet girl's face was found. On its blank side was written in a delicate hand, "Ethel L'Estrange," and in another place, by a woman's pencil: "Presented to Eveline Garth by E. R."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE LAST SCENE.

As Walter Merritt sat in the revolving chair, his eyes fixed upon the awful record of his despair, a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and, turning and rising quickly, he stood face to face with Pedro.

Never a word said Pedro. His eyes wandered up and down the clothes that had been worn into tatters against the iron bars, rested on the pale, haggard face and unkempt hair, filled with tears, and dropped.

Walter grasped his hand eagerly.

"Tell me what has happened," he said, "for God's sake!"

"I think you had better hear it of Mr. Dodge," said Pedro, speaking slowly, and eying him askance. "He told me if you came here not to tell you—not to say anything whatever, but to send you directly to him. Shall I—would you—do you desire my company? You look very bad!"

Walter murmured some unintelligible words and left. He remembered, when he had gone a few steps, a hundred questions that he might have asked Pedro, but he would not turn back. He went on to the familiar house, only once pausing when a poster with his own name upon it attracted his attention. It was the offer of a reward to be given to any one who should find him, alive or dead, or give information of his whereabouts.

At last, and it seemed like a journey of weary hours, he reached the house. The servant opened the door. He went into the familiar room, was met at its entrance by Frazer Dodge, looked into the penetrating eyes, and saw there—absolutely nothing.

"You have not been imprisoned, then," said Walter. "You have been free. Is it over? Is it delayed? Is there any hope still, tell me?"

The impenetrable eyes looked keenly at their questioner. The lawyer's hand laid hold on Walter's, drew him toward a chair, in the light of the sunset pouring in at a side-window. Then Frazer Dodge said, slowly and distinctly:

"It is not over; it is not as bad as you expect. Now, prove to me that you are not insane, before I say another word. It is necessary that you should command yourself."

"Look at me," said Walter; "I have been imprisoned, tortured with—"

"Tut, tut," said the lawyer; "you're out now. It doesn't matter in the least. Do you think you could bear a little—"

"Anything but this suspense!"

"I'm sure it won't hurt him in the least," said a voice close beside him; and he turned, and with a shout of almost unearthly joy, gathered Ethel to his arms. The sunset's glorious light fell full upon her beautiful face, pale and thin, but sweet with love and happiness.

She was, indeed, saved from her awful unmerited doom through the energy and skill of Frazer Dodge alone.

The confession of Maria Bell, the red powders still found in Yellow Jude's possession, the discoveries made through Oscar L'Estrange's death, furnished a complete train of evidence in her favor.

As the person whose life had really been attempted, Ethel herself, was still alive, there was no new accusation made. Law for once moved quickly, for a young and beautiful woman and heiress as well, excited universal sympathy, and she was released just in time, as it happened, to greet her lover, whose mysterious disappearance had excited much curiosity, and, on the part of his relatives, the liveliest alarm.

When the first raptures of the lovers were over, Lawyer Dodge joined them, and he and Walter exchanged accounts of what had happened since they parted.

It was hours before the intense interest of their conversation subsided, and then Walter, suddenly recalled to a sense of his forlorn appearance, contrived to make himself, in a measure, presentable, and went to his own home.

"Miss Montijo, as I suppose we must now call her, has honored me with a visit. I have a maiden aunt here as hostess," said Lawyer Dodge. "Indeed there was, strange to say, no other house open."

"Mrs. Merritt, as she will soon let me call her," said Walter, taking Ethel's hand fondly in his own, "will soon have the protection of my roof. She will be welcomed now by one and all," he added, just a little bitterly. "Until the day arrives, we are very grateful for your hospitality, and neither of us can ever forget what you have done for us."

They never did. The lawyer became one of their household, loved and honored by both.

In the fulfillment of her wedding-day, so long delayed, there were a host of friends, eager to heap gifts and congratulations upon the beautiful heiress; but Walter and Ethel looked to each other and a few chosen friends for their future happiness.

Among the crowd that thronged around the new-made bride were John Sumner and Maria Bell, who had achieved her triumph over "Tess," and was now Mrs. Sumner, utterly oblivious that the grave gentleman by whom she had been cross-examined at a recent trial was her lost and fickle lover, John Anderson.

After acquiring the profession of the law by diligent study and application, Walter Merritt learned that there was a keen enjoyment in occupation, that life was incomplete without it—learned also that he was not without faculties in which he might well take pride, and striving always to use these faculties in the service of right, has already won a meed of honor, and were he and his wife this moment deprived of riches, would not again find himself in the pitiable state to which he was once reduced by exile from his father's home.

THE END.

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